

Swaziland: Helping communities care for AIDS orphans

Given the scope of the AIDS epidemic, even close-knit African communities struggle to care for all the orphans in their midst, as well as children whose parents are chronically ill. Part of the proceeds from this year's 30 Hour Famine will go to Swaziland, to improve the well-being of 8,000 such children.

The lineup of children at the Neighborhood Care Point is getting longer by the minute. Villagers have gathered to provide a morning meal for orphans and children whose parents are critically ill. The food situation for such children has become desperate because of rising food prices, as well as the sheer number of children needing help. World Vision provides the main food rations for the month but because of increasing demand, villagers are contributing too.

In communities across Swaziland, people are working together to care for these vulnerable kids in groups called "Community Care Coalitions". Members might include everyone from local nurses and teachers to members of the business community. The more people get involved, the more the word gets out: these children need everyone's support.



Working together

Many of the groups have started income-generating projects in their communities in an effort to provide for the children. Others have ploughed fields provided by the local chief, designated to feed the orphans and those struggling to care for their parents. Backyard gardens have been introduced to some communities, with World Vision providing fruit trees and seedlings. With World Vision's help, some groups have started small businesses to help support the children. Children are fed, school fees paid, uniforms purchased and houses constructed. Members of the community visit the children weekly, ensuring that their physical needs are met. There's also much-needed counseling for children whose lives have been turned upside down.

Phumzile Ndlovu's Community Care Coalition is made up of 30 members. "We're very grateful to World Vision for coming up with this concept of Community Care Coalitions," says the primary teacher. "We are such an organized group of different people and we want to provide for the children." But he notes that the number of children orphaned or made vulnerable by AIDS is growing daily, and the group is looking for new strategies all the time.

NOTE TO EDITOR: With the help of 30 Hour Famine funds, World Vision will increase the number of Community Care Coalition facilitators in Swaziland, and the number of visits to children's homes. We want to provide more children with shelter, school fees and clothing. We also want to increase the capacity of government to co-ordinate issues related to orphans and other vulnerable children in Swaziland. We want to install an officer for monitor monitoring and evaluation of programs, and to facilitate the collection of related data.

Eat nothing. Do something.

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