



Irish Aid

Department of Foreign Affairs
An Roinn Gnóthai Eachtracha

Children's stories

Rebecca, Timothy, Matthews, Jacqueline, Martin and Derek, Winnie, Lourdes
Children affected by HIV and AIDS



Martin & Derek

Sharing a dream
Uganda

“My relatives said they wouldn’t help me because my father had died of AIDS. They didn’t want to introduce it into their families.”

Martin Okonera

“People are not judged by their greatness but by the challenges they have passed through.”

Derek Gubi

Friendship, determination and a dream to study medicine are not all that Derek and Martin share. The school friends have also lost their parents to AIDS. “I was 7 when my mother died,” says Derek Gubi. “It was so bad. I gave up hope.”

Martin Okonera was orphaned at 16. “My whole world crashed. I asked my relatives for school fees and they turned a deaf ear.” Hearing that bursaries were available at The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), Martin came alone to the centre at Jinja. “I was very scared. I didn’t know what to expect. But they counselled me and helped me to socialise so I won’t feel lonely.”

Martin now lives in a neighbour’s house with 18 other youngsters. TASO funds have brought him through school to his final year. It hasn’t been easy. “Everybody in my class knew why my father died. Some friends began shying away from me.”

Derek was one of the few who stood by him. “I encouraged him because I have passed through a similar thing.” Living with relatives, Derek has also endured stigma. “My cousins would go for food and not let me have any. They would play games and not let me join in. My uncle just gave good things to his children.”

With counselling from TASO staff, both for the boys and their families, Derek and Martin now feel accepted at home and are encouraging each other through their final year at school.

Martin is spurred on by the memory of his father’s last night. “When my dad was admitted to hospital, that night 6 people died. And every time I thought, my dad is going to be next. When he died, I thought I want to fight a battle for humanity. If I become a doctor I can save somebody’s life, like TASO has saved mine.”

Since 1987, TASO has provided medical, emotional and practical support to people living with HIV and AIDS. It aims to prevent further infections and care for those affected by HIV and AIDS in order to improve their quality of life. Besides counseling and testing, staff at the 11 national centres provide antiretrovirals, skills training, income generating activities and HIV education. Nearly 100,000 people are accessing TASO centres regularly, of whom 10% are children.

In collaboration with three other donors, Irish Aid supports TASO through a basket fund. This pooled mechanism streamlines the distribution of grants to civil society organisations working to combat HIV and AIDS in Uganda. At government level, Irish Aid supports the Ugandan AIDS Commission, building capacity in order to plan and manage the national response to HIV and AIDS.

Uganda has made great strides in tackling the disease, with adult prevalence dropping from 18.3% in 1992 to 6.7% in 2007. Huge challenges remain, however; 46% of Uganda’s 7.5 million children are orphaned or considered vulnerable and more than 3 million live below the poverty line. In its support for the Government of Uganda and civil society organisations, Irish Aid focuses on HIV prevention, home based care and improving the lives of orphans and vulnerable children.



Jacqueline

A positive role model
Uganda

"I thought HIV could not just come into anyone's body. I thought it was for prostitutes."

Jacqueline Alesi

Only after the death of her baby did 17 year-old Jacqueline Alesi admit she should take an HIV test. Before then she hadn't accepted she could be at risk.

"I used to think that HIV was different from other things. That it would not happen to me because I trusted myself. I didn't know that you can't trust other people."

Looking back, however, she realises there were warning signs. "When we first met, the father of my child asked if I was scared of HIV and AIDS. I answered 'I don't know'. I was laughing because I didn't understand about the disease."

Now 23, Jacqueline works to save others from the anguish she has endured. As a peer counsellor for Young Positives, a nongovernmental organisation in Kampala, she tells her story in schools and communities in order to motivate other young people to live carefully. "I don't want people to go through what I did when I found out my status. I went home and locked myself in my room. My parents knocked on the door. I was terrified to tell them." While Jacqueline's father was immediately supportive, her mother lashed out. "She told me, 'You are no longer my child. You are already dead.' I was about to go and buy poison."

Resolving instead to use her experience constructively, Jacqueline began to volunteer at Young Positives. "I have taught so many people about the virus - even my mother. I told her that just because I have HIV doesn't mean I'm sick with AIDS. She supports me completely now." Jacqueline also strives to live healthily. She exercises, eats well and talks willingly, if selectively, about living with the virus. "I want to be a role model. Coming out and disclosing my status to my parents made me free. But I am careful who I talk to. First I ask myself, will it help me to tell that person?"

Besides training peer counsellors, Young Positives runs income generating activities such as bookbinding and envelope-making, from which young people may acquire practical and vocational skills. It offers voluntary testing and counseling for children and young people, as well as community home based care. Through such services, Young Positives aims to improve the quality of life for young people living with HIV and AIDS and help stop the spread of the virus in Uganda.

Irish Aid is one of the donors supporting Young Positives and other civil society organisations through a joint basket fund. From this central pool, grants are distributed to national, district and local nongovernmental organisations in a streamlined way, cutting administrative costs and providing a clear channel for monitoring and accountability. Irish Aid also supports the Ugandan Government's National Strategic plan for HIV and AIDS, the goal of which is to provide universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention, care, treatment and social support by 2012.

Uganda has made great progress in tackling HIV and AIDS, with prevalence stabilising at less than 7% in the last 5 years. Despite this 'maturation' of the epidemic, there are still around 132,000 new infections every year. It is estimated that one million people are living with HIV, of which 105,000 are children under fourteen years.



Matthews

Earning and encouraging Zambia

"I never thought I would learn to drive. And now I am even able to assist others with money."

Matthews Nowe

Zambia is one of the world's poorest countries, with high levels of income inequality and more than two-thirds of the population living on less than a dollar a day. More than 1 million Zambians are living with HIV and 630,000 children have been orphaned by AIDS.

Sickness and death have broken down the traditional safety net of the extended family. Young people are left at risk of abuse, child labour and, in urban areas, a life on the streets.

When Matthews Nowe's mother died he dropped out of school to care for his father. "He went blind with AIDS," says Matthews. "Walking became hard. I had to support his body every time he went to the clinic. People stared at us. I felt so lonely."

A neighbour, who volunteers as a care giver for the Home Based Care (HBC) project in Kabatwa, Lusaka, alerted staff to the family's difficulties. The project provided a wheelchair for Matthews' father and seeds for his stepmother Patricia to grow vegetables. Care givers also visited every week.

"They were the only people we could talk to," says Patricia. "When my husband died they comforted us and encouraged us through our problems."

The project paid for Matthews to go back to school and staff invited him to join their youth group. "I started to play football with people my age. We learned to share experiences. At first it was hard to join in. I felt shy. But then I saw it wasn't only me. Other children had worse problems."

On leaving school, staff at Kabatwa HBC enrolled Matthews on a driving course. He is now a taxi driver and the family breadwinner. Besides paying his sister's school fees, he makes a monthly contribution to Kabatwa HBC to support other orphans. He plays football and helps train children in life skills, dealing with issues such as bereavement and stigma. "I tell them to work extra hard so they can provide for their families like me."

Matthews is one of 60 orphaned and vulnerable children who have received vocational training through the Kabatwa HBC project. Others are now working as tailors, bricklayers, carpenters and mechanics. Besides counselling, school funding and skills training, the project runs group saving schemes through which community members can buy livestock or seeds to earn money.

Irish Aid and other donors support Kabatwa and 61 other projects under the Community HBC Programme of the Archdiocese of Lusaka. More than 15,000 orphaned and vulnerable children are currently being helped by the programme. Assistance is tailored to individual needs and ranges from the payment of school fees and the provision of uniforms to training in vocational and life skills.

Through such community initiatives, Irish Aid targets Zambia's most needy children and their families. It also works with government and other donors to inform policy and coordinate the broader response to HIV and AIDS under the National AIDS Commission. By contributing at local and country level, Irish Aid is helping to tackle the causes of poverty and inequality in Zambia.



Rebecca

Care for the carer Zambia

“When I’m hungry it is hard to concentrate at school. Every day I wake up and worry about food. Yesterday we ate just once. And nothing the day before.”

Rebecca Phiri

Zambia is a resource-rich land that has enjoyed recent economic growth. Despite this, two-thirds of Zambians live below the national poverty line.

With an adult prevalence of 14%, HIV has both caused and fuelled privation, while undermining family structures of care and leaving more than half a million children orphaned by AIDS. These, and other needy children, are relying increasingly on the government and community organisations for help.

While 55% of people needing treatment are now accessing antiretrovirals, only 8% of those are children.

There is no clock in the two roomed house Rebecca Phiri shares with her grandmother and 3 siblings in Mtendere Compound, Lusaka. But keeping time is critical for the 15 year-old.

“At 7 o’clock in the morning and evening I give tablets to my little sister. She must take them at the same times otherwise they will not work properly. So every day I am asking my neighbours for the time.”

As well as administering antiretrovirals, Rebecca washes 9 year-old Mary twice a day and cooks and cleans for the family.

“My mother died this year. I felt so bad. I stopped going to school due to lack of fees and no food. Some days we eat nothing. Then we just sleep.” Hunger hits Mary the hardest; antiretrovirals increase the appetite and can weaken the body further when taken without food.

A neighbour alerted staff at the Home Based Care (HBC) project in Mtendere to Rebecca and Mary’s plight. The project initially provided the family with mealie meal. However, since the World Food Programme cut its support to Zambia this year, the Phiris have relied increasingly on the charity of neighbours for food.

Rebecca pins her hope on education. She is now back at school, her fees and uniform paid for by Mtendere HBC, one of 62 projects run by the Community HBC Programme in the Archdiocese of Lusaka. “One day I want to be a doctor so I can help sick people like my sister.”

Her attendance is irregular, however. Since Mary started complaining of head and stomach pains, Rebecca has been skipping school every Thursday to take her to the clinic, an hour’s walk away. They wait most of the day to be seen.

Rebecca and Mary are among more than 15,000 orphaned and vulnerable children supported by the Community HBC Programme. Nearly 4000 care givers have been trained to visit homes, counsel families and identify needs. Besides funding secondary education, the programme helps school-leavers to access training courses. Families are also taught income generating skills such as vegetable gardening. And through sports such as football and netball, children are encouraged to come together and share their struggles.

Irish Aid supports the Community HBC Programme and other nongovernmental organisations to improve the lives of Zambia’s orphaned and vulnerable children. It also works with government and other donors, contributing to policy formation and feeding into the National AIDS Council, which oversees a multisectoral response to the disease.

By contributing at local, district and national levels, Irish Aid feeds on-the-ground experience into national decision-making. It helps both the government to devise policy and individuals to combat the causes and effects of poverty in their lives.



Timothy

Ambition for the future Zambia

"I have big dreams for my grandmother. I think of taking care of her when she gets old and making her happy. She has brought us from low to high."

Timothy Mwanza

After bringing up 13 children of her own Ernestina Wali has taken 3 extra 'grandchildren' under her roof. Patrick, Timothy and Oliver Mwanza have shared her house in Kabwata, Lusaka, since they were orphaned in 2004.

"Their grandmother was my best friend," says Ernestina. "She died, then their mother. In our community you cannot just leave the children. So I said let me take them in."

Before she died the boys' mother asked the coordinator of Kabwata Home Based Care (HBC) Project to help her sons continue at school. Besides paying their fees, the project has provided uniforms and life skills training for the boys.

Now in their teens, the brothers are excelling. Oliver hopes to become an accountant; Patrick is on a training course in information communication, and Timothy wants to study medicine.

"Without HBC we could be on the street," he says. But while the project can fund him through school, there is no money for tertiary support. Cephass Musamba, the HBC programme officer for orphaned and vulnerable children says Timothy will have to look elsewhere for university sponsorship. "He has come so far. You can't just dump someone. It would be such a waste."

Ernestina agrees that further education is the key to the boys' security. "Once they are educated, whether I'm dead or not, they will not suffer. My dream is that these children can forget about saying, 'My mother died, my father died,' and will have a bright future."

Kabwata HBC is one of 62 projects run by the Community HBC Programme of the Archdiocese of Lusaka. The programme is helping more than 15,000 orphaned and vulnerable children to improve their quality of life. Volunteers from the community are trained as care givers who visit homes to counsel and identify needs. In this way help can be tailored to each family. Besides offering educational support, the programme brings children and teenagers together through sport. Youngsters learn to share their struggles and help each other cope with issues arising from HIV and AIDS. After leaving school, some enroll through the programme on vocational courses.

Irish Aid is one of the donors supporting the Community HBC Programme through funding and help with financial management. With Irish Aid assistance, more than 1,000 orphaned and vulnerable children are at primary or secondary school and 6,000 orphaned and vulnerable children have received counselling from trained care givers.

Such ground-level funding is a crucial part of Irish Aid's support to Zambia, where more than 1 million people are living with HIV and around 630,000 children have been orphaned by AIDS. Irish Aid focuses on orphaned and vulnerable children and a multisectoral approach to tackle poverty and inequality. As well as supporting community organisations, Irish Aid works with the Government of Zambia and other donors to develop policy and streamline the country's response to HIV and AIDS through the National AIDS Council.



Winnie

The chance to dance Uganda

"I love being with children who have similar problems. It makes me forget some of mine."

Winnie Kasoga

While HIV prevalence in Uganda has fallen by more than 11% to less than 7% over the last 16 years, the country still faces huge challenges. Income and gender inequality remain high and 20% of people live below the poverty line.

Uganda has more than 7 million orphans and vulnerable children, and 105 000 children are HIV positive.

"I would like to be treated well; to feel loved and valued and to go back to school."

Winnie Kasoga loves dancing. She comes as often as she can to practice at The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) in Jinja, which is not as often as she'd like because Winnie sometimes has increased responsibilities in the home including washing dishes, cooking and fetching water for her Grandmother.

"When I found out I was sick I didn't understand. I was just a little child. How could I get HIV? Then the counsellors at TASO told me I got it from my mother. That gave me an answer. It strengthened me."

Winnie was 7 when her mother died. Her 3 sisters - all HIV negative - found homes with relatives. Winnie, however, was abandoned until a friend of her mother took her in. Enrolling at TASO, Winnie received counselling, antiretroviral drugs and food - at which point her grandmother agreed to take her in.

"Although Winnie now lives with her family, she continues to struggle for acceptance at home. She has responsibility for remembering to take her medicine, "I try to take it at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. I get the time from a neighbour's radio."

Staff at TASO battle to counter such stigma in the home. They hold workshops for guardians, to address prejudice and encourage those who care for HIV positive children. Harriet Amongin, who counsels Winnie at TASO, says it will take time. "Winnie must be treated like other children. She is just as important and precious. It makes no difference if she has HIV. Who knows what God has planned for her?"

Of the 90,000 clients served by TASO in 11 centres round Uganda, 10% are children. The organisation offers HIV and AIDS prevention and education, antiretroviral therapy, counselling and practical support, such as income generation and skills training.

Irish Aid is one of 4 donors supporting TASO through the basket fund, a joint pool for disbursing grants to civil society organisations in Uganda. Working under the National AIDS Commission, this pooled system streamlines donor support in line with government plans, cutting administrative costs and providing a clear system for monitoring and financial management.



Lourdes

Being a child Mozambique

Mozambique ranks 170 out of 177 countries in the United Nations Development Index.

At 16%, the HIV prevalence rate in Mozambique is one of the highest in the world, with an estimated 500 new infections every day.

It is estimated that the number of children orphaned by AIDS will reach one million by 2010.

There are currently over 100,000 HIV positive people accessing treatment in Mozambique, of which 7% are children. The Clinton Foundation, with support from Irish Aid, has worked with the Government of Mozambique to realise access to treatment.

Eight year old Lourdes Absalao loves tangerines and playing with her friends is her favourite pastime. She says that her favourite games are hopscotch and tip-the-can. She loves school, maths is her favourite class and when she grows up she wants to be a school teacher. Lourdes lives with her Mother and two brothers. Her Father died almost four years ago. Lourdes, her Mother, Lete, and her younger brother known as 'Junior' live with HIV and have been in receipt of anti-retroviral treatment since 2005. Lourdes says that she takes her medication every day before school and again when she comes home in the evening.

Vicodemo, a home-based care initiative in Inhambane, provides support to Lourdes and her family. Established in 2001, the project provides outreach services to HIV positive families living in rural communities. Vicodemo provides a range of support services including counselling and dietary advice while supporting adherence to medication. Vicodemo has 78 volunteers who work with the community support vulnerable children and their families.

Vicodemo counsellor, Christine Iarunda visits Lourdes and her family once a week, bringing food from their farm plot and providing financial assistance so that the family can attend the HIV clinic.

By supporting such community initiatives, Irish Aid is tackling the causes and effects of poverty and household vulnerability in Mozambique. Irish Aid is the largest donor to the health sector in Mozambique and also provides support to the National AIDS Council, which funds the activities of 150 HIV civil society organisations, including Vicodemo.



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