

# REGIONAL FACT SHEET

## ON CHILDREN IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

### Situation of children in the region<sup>1</sup>

**Children make up a very high proportion of the region's population.** More than 50% of the population in East and Southern Africa are children.

**One in every six children in the region (28 million) have lost one or both parents.** The leading cause of this orphaning is due to HIV and AIDS. The HIV pandemic is still at catastrophically high levels in sub-Saharan Africa. The region accounts for approximately 67% HIV infections worldwide and 72% of the world's AIDS-related deaths<sup>2</sup>.

**Children and young people are highly affected by HIV.** Apart from the loss of their parents, many live with ill caregivers, are moved from one home to another, drop out of school, face increased vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and deprivation, and are often rejected by friends, neighbours and teachers due to the stigma of AIDS.

**High proportions of children and youth in the region are living with HIV.** Of an estimated 2.5 million children living with HIV globally, 90% of these live in the Sub-Saharan region.<sup>3</sup> Currently, just under a third of children who require treatment are receiving it.<sup>4</sup>

**In addition to HIV and AIDS, children are also vulnerable due to other causes, such as poverty and conflict.** An estimated two thirds of the population in the SADC region live below the international poverty line of US\$1 per day. One in ten children in SADC die before their fifth birthday, and a third of these deaths are directly attributable to poverty.<sup>5</sup> Recent conflicts in certain countries in the region have displaced and traumatised thousands of children and youth.

**Certain groups of children are especially vulnerable.** Girl children, children living in rural areas, children with disabilities, and children living in child headed households, in very poor households, or on the streets are also especially vulnerable.

**Young people are also vulnerable.** Vulnerability does not end when children they leave childhood. Due to widespread poverty and unemployment, many youth are struggling to survive and stay safe.

**The effects of poverty, conflict, HIV and AIDS on children and youth can never be over-stated.** A growing number of children in the region suffer emotional trauma, depression, neglect, abuse, deprivation, overwhelming grief, upheaval, discrimination and social exclusion affecting their social, emotional and mental health<sup>6</sup>.

There is a critical need to help children in the region to cope with the adverse social and emotional effects of poverty, conflict, HIV and AIDS.

### REPSSI's response

All children have material needs such as food, shelter, health care and education. But children also have the right to be cared for, loved, encouraged and protected from harm.

Children and youth exposed to the devastating effects of poverty, conflict, HIV and AIDS are especially in need of care for their emotional and social (psychosocial) wellbeing. Many have lost

parents and family, experienced extreme deprivation and abuse, been stigmatized or uprooted, witnessed atrocities, and suffered overwhelming grief.

With the right social and emotional support, these children are resilient enough to grow into capable and compassionate adults, living with hope and dignity.

REPSSI (the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative) helps children get the emotional and social support to which they are entitled. REPSSI is a non-profit organisation working to lessen the devastating social and emotional (psychosocial) impact of HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict on children and youth across East and Southern Africa.

REPSSI partners with NGOs and governments across East and Southern Africa. With our technical advice and support, these partners implement policies and programmes which strengthen the ability of communities and families to care for and protect their children and youth.

Our assistance includes providing easy-to-use and culturally appropriate tools, and sharing innovative approaches. We train partners to provide social and emotional services to children and their communities, and we produce activities and tools that can be used with children, youth, communities and families.

Several million children are being supported by REPSSI partners in over 1000 project sites across the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Main Source: SADC (2010), *The Situation of Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children and Youth in the SADC Region*. REPSSI and UNICEF supported the production of this analysis for the SADC Secretariat.

<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS (2009), *2009 AIDS Epidemic Update*: 21.

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS (2007), *2007 AIDS Epidemic Update*.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF (2009), *Children and AIDS: Fourth Stocktaking Report*

<sup>5</sup> Based on 2007 population and under-5 mortality data for *State of the World's Children*, UNICEF (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Richter *et al.* 2004