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Supporting the most vulnerable

The pride of Zimbabwe has been its children – walking, even running, happily to school in the most far off corners of the country. Education levels were high, the future seemed bright. Sweden supported this development, education being one of the main sectors of its development cooperation. Today millions of children live precarious lives. Swedish millions target those in greatest need, the orphans and the vulnerable children.

One in four Zimbabwean children (about 1.3 million) is an orphan, having lost one or both parents. Around 50 000 households are headed by a child. 80 per cent are orphans due to AIDS. Although HIV infection rates are decreasing, tens of thousands more children are added to these ranks every year.

Compounding this crisis is the disastrous government policies over the last ten years. Democratic governance has been curtailed, oppressive policies advanced, resulting in a high number of internally displaced people. Economic policies have followed suit, causing an unprecedented economic decline.

The democratic deficit has resulted in a decline in international development aid and credit facilities, while increased humanitarian support has been, and is, essential for sustaining the livelihoods of the poor, not least the orphans and vulnerable children (OVC)\(^1\). It is hoped that the new political dispensation will reverse this negative trend.

A joint approach

Swedish aid is today concentrated on the funding of a multi-donor programme of support for OVCs. The purpose of the programme is to increase access by orphans and other vulnerable children to basic social services and improve their protection from all forms of abuse.

For a number of years Sweden supported OVCs through various NGOs and CBOs. Among Sida partners were: the Farm Orphan Support Trust, Cadec, Sahrit, Scripture Union, the Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children UK and Mashambanzou. At least 300 000 children were reached.

Other donors acted in a similar fashion, resulting in a rather inefficient system where NGOs and CBOs were dependent on various donors for short term funding and where coverage was rather patchy.

Though successful and justifiable given the circumstances at the time, there was a need to rationalise funding and support systems. A joint system is better suited to the holistic and rights-based approach on which Sweden bases its development aid. It is also in line with the Paris Agenda, emphasising the coordination of aid and its alignment to national programmes.

\(^1\) Vulnerable children are children with unfulfilled needs and include e.g. children with disabilities, affected by HIV/AIDS, abused, working and abandoned children, children in remote areas and children defined as vulnerable by their communities.
The UNICEF OVC programme
In 2004 the Government, through several ministries, a number of NGOs and UN agencies represented by UNICEF, worked out a National Plan of Action for OVCs. The overall goal of the plan is to ensure that orphans and vulnerable children enjoy access to essential services, including education, food, health services, birth registration and are protected from abuse.

Based on the Government plan the programme is coordinated and managed by UNICEF. The donors pool their funds in a UNICEF account and UNICEF disburses funds to contracted organisations which carry out the work. Funding through the programme was initiated in 2007.

Through a selection process 27 NGOs have been approved for funding. They, in their turn, fund and manage more than 150 other partner NGOs and CBOs at the local level, reaching an estimated 400 000 children in 62 districts and 892 wards.

There are a number of advantages of a joint programme of this kind. Management costs are reduced, NGOs receive longer term secured funding, coordination amongst them is improved and a good sectoral and geographic coverage is ensured. In essence – the various needs of more children are covered.

Poverty mitigation through CARE
Poverty constrains children’s rights. When household incomes increase children’s needs can be fulfilled. On that basis Sweden funds a rural micro-finance project carried out by CARE International. In the present programme at least 60 000 households are reached.

In the CARE programme communities are trained on how to mobilise and manage their own financial resources. Groups are also trained on how to plan and manage income-generating businesses. The programme covers districts in Masvingo and Manicaland provinces, as well as some Harare high density suburbs.

CARE further partners with five other organisations (CADEC, Batsirai, ASAP, Utano and ZWB) in order to broaden the programme’s outreach.

The majority of participants are women. Gender-related issues are strengthened and the effects of the programme are consistent with the Swedish policy on gender equality.

An earlier evaluation concluded that households participating increased their disposable income, assets and social status and self-esteem among participants improved.

Justice for Children
Children’s legal rights are often not upheld in Zimbabwe, in spite of laws guaranteeing them. Few, if any, NGOs cover this area. The Justice for Children Trust, set up in 2003 and mainly funded by Sweden, tries to fill this gap.

The economic and political crisis has exacerbated abuses of the rights of children. Political violence has resulted in the mistreatment of children. Economic hardships lead to family break-down and conflicts regarding inheritance, custody, child maintenance etc. Child sexual abuse has increased.

“We have three main programmes”, says Petronella Nyamapfene, National Coordinator at JCT. “These are legal aid, birth registration and criminal matters. Birth registration is a right, but today many cannot afford it, creating a number of problems for the children”.

At JCT four lawyers and a number of volunteers identify cases in cooperation with civil society organisations. The Ministry of Justice sees JCT as filling a gap, while relations with other authorities are sometimes more strained, as JCT exposes violations and negligence of duties.

To improve the situation, JCT carries out legal education in government departments, magistrates, the police force, in schools as well as in communities.

“We want to train paralegals who can advise and support people at the community level”, says Petronella Nyamapfene. “We also want to strengthen a volunteer lawyer service around the country.” With such support, communities will be able to demand their rights.

Facts and figures

Programme of Support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
A multi-donor, coordinated programme managed by UNICEF in cooperation with Government and donors. Swedish contribution 2006 – 2010: USD 6 000 000

Justice for Children Trust (JCT)
JCT provides legal services for children and guardians, educates communities and authorities and improves the rights of children. Swedish contribution 2006 – 2008: SEK 5 500 000 (appr. USD 650 000)

CARE International
Sweden funds CARE’s rural microfinance project, reaching more than 60 000 households. Swedish contribution 2007 – 2011: USD 3 200 000

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