



Mobilising Children & Youth into their Own Child- & Youth-led Organisations

by Kurt Madoerin

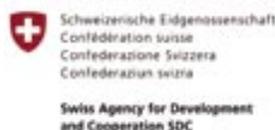




Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children

REPSI is privileged to have enjoyed a long and fruitful association with Dr Kurt Madoerin. This particular publication represents the harvest of his evidence based, ground breaking work with children over many decades. As an organisation and as a team, we are proud to have contributed to “Building Child- and Youth-led Organisations”.

Noreen Huni
Executive Director,
REPSI, May, 2008



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This publication is aimed at:

- Adults within organisations who are already working with children and youth and who would like to move in the direction of giving these children and youth greater autonomy and participation opportunities;
- Children and youth who would like to assume more responsibility around matters that concern them and who would like to move in the direction of child- and youth-led organisations.

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TABLE 1

| Region | Number of children |
|----------|--------------------|
| Region 1 | 10 |
| Region 2 | 15 |
| Region 3 | 20 |
| Region 4 | 25 |
| Region 5 | 30 |

Foreword



Jonathan Morgan, Editor, Knowledge Development Manager, REPSSI, June 2008

Interventions designed to improve the wellbeing of children outside of the school system typically are able to reach only relatively small numbers of children. By mobilising children into their own child- and youth-led organisations it is possible to reach much higher numbers of children. Vijana Simama Imara (VSI) and Rafiki Mdogo, the key examples in this book, have a total number of 3 400 child and youth members mobilised across 21 rural villages in Tanzania. This has been achieved at a cost of only \$6 per month per child and where two thirds goes directly to the child in form of cash, materials for house construction, training, medical support or school support.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child affirms children's right to form and join associations. Involvement in associations helps children to develop skills for active civic engagement.

Child-led associations can develop social awareness and organisational skills of children. They also empower children by giving them a voice in their own affairs and can be especially powerful in advocacy efforts. They are especially important for developing the personal

and interpersonal (psychosocial) skills of marginalised children. Examples of these psychosocial or life skills include trust, communication, conflict resolution, HIV prevention and team work. Child-led associations also help to protect children from abuse through strength in numbers. By meeting their contemporaries in similar situations, children can give each other emotional support and realise that they are not alone. Child-led associations can foster democratic principles and democratic skills among children. Through child-led associations, children can learn to become active citizens.

This publication explores child- and youth-led organisations from many different angles, amongst others, HIV and AIDS prevention, the critical role of adults within these organisations, and economic strengthening. What is also perhaps distinctive about the approach outlined in this booklet is the fact that organisation of children into their own child- and youth-led organisations is considered primarily from a psychosocial wellbeing perspective. While the publication draws heavily on – and focuses on – the experience of a single child- and youth-led organisation in Tanzania (VSI), additional chapters refer

to other lessons learned by other child- and youth-led organisations across Southern and Eastern Africa.

In 1997, Kurt Madoerin, found himself in Nshamba, a small trading village in North-Western Tanzania where he founded HUMULIZA in response to the emerging crisis engulfing children in the region. HUMULIZA's objectives were to develop practical approaches to enable teachers and caregivers to provide psychological support to orphans, and to develop the capacity of orphans to cope with the loss of their caregivers and loved ones.

In March 2000, HUMULIZA invited 17 orphans from different villages for a one-week workshop. Time was spent appreciating the children's innate strengths exemplified by what they were already doing, and what they had learnt and did better than other children precisely because they are orphans.

After getting a clearer idea of what could be done individually, as well as where support from others could be helpful, serious attention was given to the idea of creating an organisation to be led and run by children.

This idea took root and the organisation was named “Vijana Simama Imara” (Youth Standing Upright) (Madoerin K, 2006, Children and Money, loans and unconditional cash transfers to orphaned children, Unpublished paper)

Several decades of experience in working with vulnerable children across the planet had resulted in Kurt coming to believe that in the face of family, community and societal disintegration, the single most important supportive “intervention” that could be offered “to”, and more importantly “with” children and youth, might be the mobilisation of children and youth into their own child-led and youth-led organisations.

Via what might be seen as a variant of political mobilisation or collective bargaining, Kurt hoped that children and youth might begin to see their individual needs in social terms and that collectively they stood a better chance of finding expression and fulfilment of their wellbeing.

This publication is built on the tireless and cutting-edge work of Kurt over many years. In his trademark style, it also honours the experiences and voices of some of the individuals he works with, in this case the children of VSI and Rafiki Mdogo. It is our hope that you find this publication inspirational and that it results in greater participation of children in all the work that you do.



Kurt Madoerin

VSI – Fact File

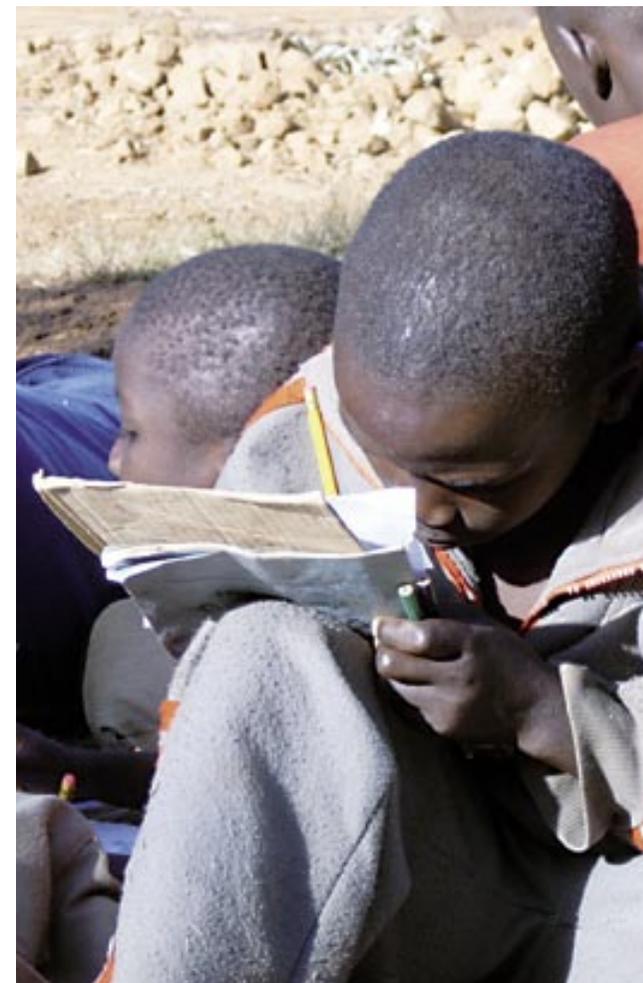
VSI is an organisation of children, most of whom have been orphaned. In Kiswahili, VSI stands for “Vijana Simama Imara”, which means Youth Standing Upright. The average age of its members is between 13–20 years. Younger children aged between 7–12 years have organised themselves into another organisation called “Rafiki Mdogo”, which means Little Friends in Kiswahili.

To date VSI has been replicated across 21 villages or clusters in Northern Tanzania. The joint membership of the two organisations is 3 400 members.

Initially membership was open only to orphans. The rules have been changed to accommodate very poor children or children living with sick parents. The youth elect their own leadership, enlist new members, and meet regularly to discuss issues and organise events or work. Replication is also taken on and driven by the members.

The main activities of VSI are:

- Organisation building and leadership training undertaken by HUMULIZA, the patron organisation;
- Counselling in the form of a Structured Group Approach for the most severely affected children;
- Material support via micro loans and unconditional cash transfers through the VSI Bank which offers a savings account service for VSI members at an individual, group and cluster level;
- Peer counselling for HIV and AIDS prevention and reproductive health;
- Self defence for girls;
- The Mobile Farm School (MFS);
- “Rafiki Mdogo” whereby older children and youth within VSI systematically work with children who fall below the minimum age for VSI membership of 13 years.



Glossary

Attendant

Attendants are VSI members who have been trained to work with the younger children in Rafiki Mdogo. Each Rafiki Mdogo group has at least two attendants.

Caretaker

The word is used in three different ways depending on the context:

1. In the first meaning, “caretakers” are those adults with whom the children live.
2. In the second meaning, caretakers are two elder VSI members who are appointed to each cluster by the HUMULIZA office in order to support the leadership in the cluster.
3. The third meaning refers to two women and two men in each VSI cluster whom the VSI members select as trusted “caretakers” who can be consulted when conflicts occur or just for general support.

Cluster

Clusters are local branches of VSI. Normally there is one cluster per village, but in some cases the cluster has been divided into Cluster A and B because of the high numbers of children.

Formative Evaluation

A formative evaluation aims to support the stakeholders of an organisation to reflection dimensions of theory and practice. It differs from an impact assessment which tries to measure or assess the short and longer term impacts of the work.

HUMULIZA

HUMULIZA is a Kihaya word and means “consolation”. It is the name of the NGO in Tanzania which created VSI.

Kwa Wazee

A programme in Nshamba for the elderly and their (orphaned) grandchildren which pays monthly pensions and provides psychosocial support.

Rafiki Mdogo

Rafiki Mdogo means “Little Friends” and embraces the children aged between 7 and 12 years.

Replicator

HUMULIZA uses older VSI members to start new clusters in new villages. These VSI members are called “replicators”.

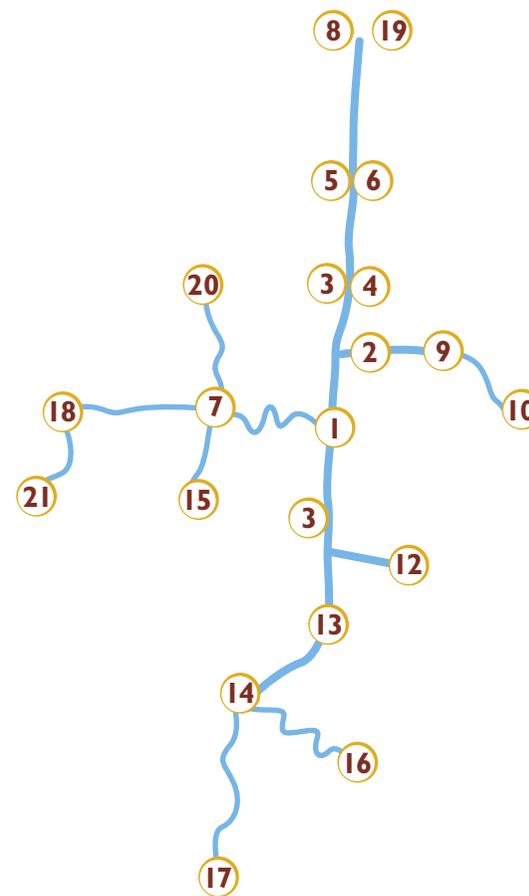
VSI

VSI is an acronym for “Vijana Simama Imara” (Youth Standing Upright). The name for their organisation was selected by the children. Children aged between 13 and 18 years can be a member of the VSI.

Patron Organisation:

For most child- and youth-led organisations, adults inevitably have a key supportive role to play. Often there are not just an informal number of key adults who perform this role of “patron”. More often than not, adult support takes the form of a committed organisation which supports the child- and youth-led organisation whilst trying to allow the children and youth as much autonomy as possible.

Map of the Region



Clusters of the VSI

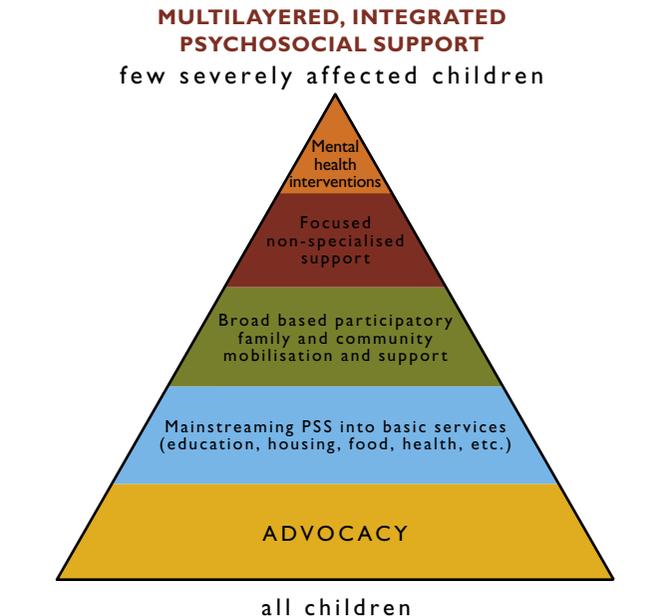
1. Nshamba
2. Itongo
3. Mulera A
4. Mulera B
5. Kishanda A
6. Kishanda B
7. kashand
8. Buhanga
9. Ihangiro
10. Rubya
11. Bugarama
12. Kihumulo
13. Biirabo
14. Kabare
15. Kanywangonge
16. Bumiro
17. Mubunda
18. Kyanshenge
19. Kashozi
20. Kabirizi
21. Buhuma

Locating Child- and Youth-Led Organisations within the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Pyramid of Psychosocial Interventions

This particular approach fills a much needed gap in psychosocial (PS) programming. A well known limitation of conventional PS programming is the fact that much of it has tended to exist in the form of vertical programming that is only able to reach very limited numbers of children in need of additional psychosocial support (PSS) – for example, group counselling, memory work, kids clubs, parenting workshops and so on.

In both conflicts and emergencies – and as a result of HIV and AIDS – people are affected in different ways and require different kinds of support. A key to organising PSS and mental health is to develop a layered system of complementary supports that meet the needs of different groups. This can be and has been represented by a pyramid by the IASC. All the layers of the pyramid are important and ideally should be implemented concurrently.

In the face of the triple impact of HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict in the Eastern and Southern African region, there are tens of millions of vulnerable



The pyramid model

Sources: Morgan, J. (2007) *Making a Hero (Active Citizen) Book – A guide for facilitators*; IASC (2007) *Guidelines of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*

children who need to be reached with additional support to the level of support that parents, caregivers, extended family, community and agencies are presently able to offer them.

In terms of the IASC pyramid of PSS presented below, mobilising children into their own child- and youth-led organisations offers an intervention that tends towards the bottom of the pyramid (i.e., with the potential to reach large numbers of children and youth).

Levels of PSS:

5. Specialised mental health services: psychiatric, clinical psychological, and specialised traditional healer services for children with clinical mental health diagnoses (potential to benefit only small numbers of the most severely affected children at any time)
4. Focused non-specialist supports: for special needs of children who are not coping, and who are exhibiting symptoms of distress (potential to affect and benefit hundreds but probably not thousands of more severely affected children at any time)
3. Family and community support: everyday care and support provided by caregivers, friends, community members (potential to affect and benefit thousands of children at any time, the most powerful and sustainable form of PSS)
2. Provision of basic services: food, shelter, education, housing, health etc. into which PSS needs to be mainstreamed (potential to affect and benefit millions of children at any time)
1. Advocacy: to influence policy and direct change to the social conditions that directly affect wellbeing (potential to affect and benefit millions of children)

TOPIC 1: Why A Child-led Organisation?



Julieta Tadeo

(girl, 13), Bumiro district



in secondary school. Other people, even children, treat you like dogs because we have no parents. Here, with other Rafiki Mdogos we can be together, to console each other and to forget that we have lost our parents.

together. We go to find a mango tree and eat mangoes. We jump and we sing. Both my parents are very sick. Also they are happy that I'm in the Rafik Mdogo. They say, "You really became a hard worker at home."



Dominik Ernesti

(boy, 10), Kabirizi district



Dominik: I really like my caretakers – Jovestani, Anita, Antidius and Alistidia who lead our meetings. I learn how to respect others, how to greet elderly and grownup people, and how to make friends. Also my best friends are in the Rafiki Mdogo – Erastos, Linus and Dikliit. We play football together, cut grass for the goat, and if possible, we collect firewood and fetch water



Filimena Victor

(girl, 14), Bumiro district,
VSI member since 2006



Filimena: How would I convince somebody to join an organisation which is made by children? I have lost both parents and I live with my grandmother. Of course the VSI supports us, for example to join secondary school. Or we construct houses together for members whose houses have collapsed. We have already constructed

three houses for this reason. If we would be alone, we couldn't do such things. We organise such work in our meetings, where we decide who we shall support and when we will do the work.

VSI also helped me very much to find friends. I have 17 friends. My best friends are Fatuma, Antia and Alikandra. They are all in VSI. We requested from the church a piece of land and we planted cassava. We have already harvested some which helps us a lot at home so that we don't remain hungry. We do also other things together in VSI. We play with the ball, or we go together to fetch firewood.



Adolf Genjara

(boy, 19), Buganguzi district,
a member of VSI since 2003

Adolf: If a child would be interested to join the VSI, I would bring him or her to our field where we plant

cassava, maize, bitter tomatoes and carrots. So the child could see with his or her own eyes what a child organisation can do. I would explain to her that we sell the products and we use the money to support our members with exercise books, pens and shoes for the school.

I'm very, very proud about VSI and it is very important for me. The most important issue is the contact with other groups of children from other villages, for example from Mubunda or Biirabo, who have similar experiences. We discuss our experiences with agriculture, what and how they plant. Or we discuss our experiences as leaders in VSI so that we can get new ideas for our own groups. Then of course the support we get from VSI is important – school material, soap etc. Also I have been trained, as a leader, as a peer educator for prevention, and now as attendant of the Rafiki Mdogo. Since I retired to be a leader within VSI, I work with the Rafiki Mdogo. Nearly all my friends, at least three quarters, I know from the VSI.

In the beginning it was quite difficult. We had to work hard on building up our group. Only after one year could we start to "harvest", also with the support from the office, that is HUMULIZA. All this, and even more, I would tell an interested child.



Rereading the interviews

A general theme that runs through all the interviews is friendship. Filimena tells us that, "VSI helped me much to find friends. I have 17 friends and my best friends are Fatuma, Antia and Alikandra. They are all in the VSI."

All three children mention that they found friends in VSI and Rafiki Mdogo. Julietha also tells us that: "Outside Rafiki Mdogo, you are treated like a dog because we have no parents."

"Working together" is another common theme in the "Why an organisation" line of enquiry. Julieta tells us: "We do homework together, read, maths, we ask each other questions."

This working together extends beyond only peer-based psychosocial support and many of the children refer to how within the organisations, children lend each other a hand to meet unmet material and economic needs (such as grass cutting, home building and food production).

In this regard, Filomena refers to building houses and expresses her insight in the rich possibilities of an organisation: "We have already constructed three houses – if we would be alone, we couldn't do such things. We

organise such work in our meetings, where we decide who we shall support and when we will do the work.”

The two younger Rafiki Mdogo children, Julietha and Dominik, highlight an important issue. Julietha says, “Our caretakers Gratus and Anita teach us topics – how to love each other or about friendship.” Dominik says: “I learn how to respect each other, how to greet elderly and grown-up people and how to make friends.” We also learn how Julietha and her friends share food and support each other when they are sick.

Each organisation creates its own “internal culture” with its own values and rules in order to accommodate the specific needs and aspirations of its members. “Friendship”, “acceptance and acknowledgment”, “love”, “mutual care”, “self-efficiency” etc. are certainly core values for children and youth threatened by stigma, exclusion and discrimination.

Adolf mentions the – very important – material support provided by the organisation for school material, soap etc., and Julietha is relying on support from the organisation so she can continue her education into secondary school.

Learning either as formal training or informal learning through exchange of experiences is another important



topic for the children. Adolf passed at least three trainings “as a leader, as a peer educator for prevention, and now as attendant of the Rafiki Mdogo”. But even more important for his learning processes he considers the possibilities offered by, and accumulated within, an organisation and here he refers to the great value he gains from contact with other youth and leaders with similar experiences.

Adolf is also an example of how an organisation can shape – in a positive sense – a personal “career”: He started as an ordinary member, was elected as a leader, later became a peer educator for prevention, and most

recently cares for and trains the Rafiki Mdogo. My observation is that VSI and Rafiki Mdogo have become a huge part of the lives and the identities of their members in ways that extend beyond their psychosocial and overall wellbeing during the times they participate in “organisational activities”. “You became a hard worker at home,” say Dominik’s sick parents.

Some lessons learned

A child-led organisation seems to be a very efficient tool to break through the isolation caused by the loss of parents and to build something like a “human shield” against exclusion and discrimination. To do this requires a minimal number of children (any number less than 200 tends more in the direction of a kids club) and a prolonged period of togetherness – both attributes which organisations can perform. So number and duration are critical.

Listening to the testimonies of why these children value VSI and Rafiki Mdogo, it becomes clear that they see the organisation not as a tool for one specific problem but as a “broad-spectrum antibiotic” which protects them in the face of a number of challenges relating to shelter, nutrition, isolation, friendships, knowledge and skills, recognition in the community etc. Being part of a child- and youth-led organisation enables them to find multiple solutions to a range of problems and difficulties.



A child-led organisation by definition – we could argue – is built on the participation of the children themselves. The ability to participate is perhaps not an innate skill within children but something which has to be learnt. Without respect towards others (especially towards younger and female) children, without empathy and without active listening, transparency, and democratic procedures, participation will remain an empty word. Participation as a mind-set has to become a core value of, and a daily practice within, the organisation. Participation has to become part of the internal culture of mutual respect.

However, such a culture is not built in a day. The longer the children are exposed to daily practices of genuine child participation and become rooted in these, the more this culture might become part of their own personal behavioural values and identity. Ten-year old Dominik has the chance to remain in the organisation for another ten years. He will be exposed to what Michel Foucault calls “permanent provocation” i.e. being permanently confronted with expectations, challenges and feedback from the other members with respect to the goals and values of the organisation.

Finally, it probably does not matter much what kind of activities or main thrust a child-led organisation has – whatever brings children together can serve as the

starting point for a child-led organisation. It could be sport or survival activities of street children, or art (like in MADaboutART), or a focus on prevention. One of the focus group activities in the formative evaluation asked members to rank VSI activities in order of importance. The various activities were livestock farming, group agriculture, running Rafiki Mdogo groups, prevention, material support, loans, group meetings, supporting the elderly and life skills training. What was interesting was that there was no real sense of ranking. No one activity was seen as more important than others, in spite of the fact that facilitators probed which was more important. This seems to corroborate the belief that when it comes to child-led organisations, it’s not what you do but how you do it that is important. And however you do it, make sure that children participate to the fullest extent possible.

Suggestions

- Create opportunities for mutual cooperation among the children in order to build a substantial network among them;
- Encourage activities which can’t be done individually but require cooperation and efforts of many children, which demonstrate the strength of the collective and which are perceived as symbols of collective power (e.g. house construction);

- Combine different types of activities in the realm of material support and support for survival, with activities in the realm of psychosocial support (i.e., mainstream PSS into other activities that are not strictly psychosocial, e.g., housing, nutrition etc.);
- Practice participation and delegation as much as possible – even in little things. It will form the bricks to build an internal culture of acknowledgment and respect,

Resources

- 1.** The VSI Policy Paper (Madoerin K, 2000) was written as a reflection paper before starting VSI. Many colleagues cautioned that to form an orphans’ organisation would expose orphaned children to additional stigma and discrimination. The paper examines the different possible benefits of a child-led organisation.
- 2.** Organizing Children for Self Help and Mutual Support (Madoerin K, 2007) is part of a concept paper for organising the grandchildren of KwaWazee, a grandmother-led organisation in Northern Tanzania. It postulates five good reasons why and how children benefit from child-led organisation and outlines the potential and impact of organising children.
- 3.** Children as Active Citizens – a Policy and Program

Guide by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation (2008) advocates the right of children's citizenship. The Chairman of the Working Group writes in the introduction, "It will serve not only as a guide for policies and programmes in the region, but also to inspire all actors, including parents, adults, government officials, and all persons working for and with children to recognise that children are indeed holders of civil rights. Most importantly, this publication will serve as a reference tool for involving younger children and marginalised children, including children in various difficult situations." The publication also contains a chapter on "Children-led organisations" (p.75). 3a is a brochure with the summary (24 pages), 3b is the full report.

4. Those who are interested in the impact of a child-led organisation can look at the "Impact Evaluation of the VSI (Vijana Simama Imara) Organisation and the Rafiki Mdogo group of the HUMULIZA orphan project, Nshamba, Tanzania (Glynis Clatcherty and Prof. David Donald, 2005). The report also provides a short overview about the program (available at www.humuliza.org/evaluation).

5. Save the Children UK has produced a resource kit of materials for increasing children's participation, Children's Participation in OVC Programming, 2004. Resource Sheet 4 (Best Practice Guidelines from the



Field) might be very helpful in a preparatory phase for those wishing to build a child or youth-led organisation.

6. The paper, Scenario-building around orphanhood and the role of psychosocial support (Madoerin K, 2008) analyses the existing literature on three

different approaches to look at orphans: orphans as a threat for the social stability, orphans as a withdrawn and depressed generation and orphans as a coping generation and as a potential part of a new civil society. Child-led organisation would fit into the last approach.

TOPIC 2: Getting Started



Gozbert Kinena
(male, 23), Nshamba



own language and experience. I also had to explain to them our ideas and the objective and to invite them to our meetings.

I didn't expect that it would be possible to form a group, or even an organisation, but I was part of this process, and now I know: it is possible. And I didn't expect that now, years later when I'm already a grown-up adult, the organisation is still there and I can support young children in new areas to form their own groups.

Gozbert: I joined the first seminar, together with 17 other orphans, in 2000, where we decided to form our own organisation. We called ourselves Vijana Simama Imara – Youth Standing Upright. The beginning was both difficult, and nice. I was very afraid that it would not be something durable, that it would last only one or two years and then it would die. But now the VSI is already eight years old!

What made me hard working was the idea that we could help each other. This was also the nice thing, this idea, that we are strong together. We did the main work, supported by Kurt and other members from HUMULIZA. I helped to contact and to visit children, to translate our idea into their



Timon Wilson
(boy, 16), Bumiro



Timon: I'm a member of the Bumiro group, since we started two years ago. Today we are 50 members, and

there are many children who would like to join. I was very interested that our village could also get a VSI group so I can get support when I'm sick or to get school material, exercise books etc.. After the meeting with the village leaders and our caretakers, I went around and took the names of children who had been identified and who expressed an interest to join. I brought the names back into the HUMULIZA office in Nshamba. Further I helped to invite the children for the first meetings. I volunteered myself to help other children or to get help for them. For the house construction we had to find the poles, to fetch water, and to prepare the mud for the walls. This we all agreed first in our meetings, that we will work as a group. Even the people in the village say that we are very cooperative and that we are strong as if we were men and women. Recently I have been elected as a leader of our group which brings me a lot of work.



Fraiden Barongo

(female, 22), who did the replication first in Kanshenge and later in Bumiro

Fraiden: My first replication in Kanshenge was quite difficult. You don't know the village, you don't know the people. We invited the village leaders and explained the project of HUMULIZA. The leaders helped us to invite the caretakers of poor children who had lost parents, or live with sick parents, or are simply very poor. These meetings were very difficult because most of the caretakers had their own interests. Their most frequent question was what HUMULIZA could offer them. It was difficult to explain that the fruits of the project can only be harvested maybe one year later and that the main purpose was to help the children.

Then we had separate meetings with children. We tried to explain to them what VSI could offer them – to be in a group and not anymore isolated and alone; to sing or to discuss things together; to make new friends, and

maybe later to get support for an income generation project. Most of the about 40 children reacted positively and remained for some time but for some of them it was too long to get some results and they broke away.

Finally we had a stable group of about 30 from the list of the most vulnerable children although also for them it was difficult to agree that they will get nothing – at least not in the beginning. So we started with them to discuss the objectives of VSI, to make rules, to start to help the elderly and to define the support they will give each other. Only after one year HUMULIZA started to give them a small monthly amount.



Rereading the interviews

If you want a meal with rice, rice will be the main ingredient for the meal. If we want a child-led organisation, then children have to play a role from the very beginning. The “getting started” has to have the flavour of the future – i.e. it has to include children as much as possible and make them eager for more. Consultation of, delegation to, and inclusion of children is imperative in the starting process. “We (the emerging VSI) did the main work” says Gozbert.

Most processes and programs aiming to form a child organisation are adult initiated which is not necessarily

a limitation. Fraiden was already a grownup when she assumed the task to replicate VSI in Kanshenge and Bumiro. Gozbert mentions support from adults (Kurt and the HUMULIZA team) in the starting phase of VSI. The big challenge is to give children, from the very beginning, a sense of ownership, the feeling of “doing the main work”.

Gozbert describes how he was involved since the beginning when he says, “I helped to contact and to visit children, to translate our idea in their own language and experience, to explain them our ideas and the objective, and to invite them for our meetings.”

Bumiro was one of the last villages where a VSI cluster was founded. The very beginning of the start-up of a new VSI branch offers possibilities for participation. Timon describes the activities he did as part of this start up, visiting and mobilising other children and inviting them for the meetings.

Mobilising children is best done through children themselves. They can translate, as Gozbert mentions, the idea of a child-led organisation into the language and experiences of children. And it gives them the “flavour” of assuming responsibility for even small issues.

Fraiden gives an illustrative example of the often uncomfortable role of adults or grownups in the

process. People have mostly material expectations. If an NGO enters into a village, they are asked “What do you offer? What can I get?” This is the mostly legitimate question asked by poor and often overburdened caretakers. But the main objective of VSI is not to distribute goods but rather to empower children. This is quite difficult to communicate, and this cannot be done by the children themselves. No wonder that Fraiden found her first replication “quite difficult”.

Another challenge is to find the right “motor” for the new organisation. Gozbert says, “What made me hard working was the idea that we could help each other. This was also the nice thing: this idea, that we are strong together.” But it is not only adults, but also children who are accustomed to see NGOs as “donors”. Timon speaks of his motivation to have a VSI in Bumiro when he says, “to get support when I’m sick or to get school material”. It is a danger to “buy” the children through promises of material support. In order to found a stable and lasting child-led organisation, the motivation of “receiving” will not be enough as continuous giving is unsustainable for any organisation. Fraiden tells us that a number of children stopped attending the meetings: “It was too long for them to get a result.” Building a solid child-led organisation is a long process, “difficult and nice” as Gozbert says.

Children anywhere in the world group and join each other easily and create informal networks, Nevertheless the idea of a formal child-led organisation is quite new in an African village, among adults and children. So children don’t know where the journey of creating a child-led organisation will go. As Gozbert says, “I didn’t expect that it would be possible to form a group, or even an organisation, but I was part of this process, and now I know: it is possible”.

Some lessons learned

The cultural norm around relationships between adults and children usually prescribes that adults will take all or most decisions and responsibilities for children. HIV and AIDS has probably modified this cultural norm. As Andrea Ledward, author of *Age, Gender and Sexual Coercion: Their roles in creating pathways of vulnerability to HIV infection* (undated), notes in the course of her research in Zimbabwe, orphaned children have weaker family ties that allow them the freedom to make more choices and to create new institutional ties. But to maximise use of these choices and make informed decisions, they need new guidelines and training. Ledward observes: “if they lack these guidelines and training, they are denied choice by being left in a hailstorm of macro forces.”

Nevertheless empowering children from outside is and will remain a very sensitive issue. An imperative rule is to avoid that the children will be “burnt”, i.e. to avoid that they are blamed by the social environment for not behaving “correctly as good children” and for “having bad manners”. We must be aware that autonomy of children is, at first glance, perceived often as “bad manners”. Adults in the organisation have to protect the children – to act socially as a shield against unfriendly non-acceptance of their new activities. Adults have to play the role of wise mediators creating an “experimental action space” for the child-led organisation, and to be aware that this is largely a new concept for both children and adults.

Creating this experimental action space for the children includes contacts with the community and their leaders and of course with the caretakers of the children. HUMULIZA had good experiences around meeting adults (e.g. caretakers) and children strictly separately. Adults are often not (yet) used to respect the autonomy of the children – and children might have not yet had a positive experience exercising their autonomy in the presence of adults.

The formative evaluation of VSI investigated the acceptance of VSI in the community after five years of its existence. Feedback from the caretakers and community

leaders, but also from randomly interviewed people in the market, was very positive. The main reasons for their appreciation of VSI were the cooperation and opportunities for friendship, mutual support, capacity building, as well as their pride, good behaviour and impressive work ethic.

The evaluation concluded: “It is clear that being part of VSI has changed their identity from that of ‘orphan’ to a contributing member of the community in the eyes of the community.....this is especially important in a context of stigma and discrimination.”

It is an advantage if NGOs or community-based organisations (CBOs) which would like to start a child-led organisation:

- Have some prior experience in working with children affected by HIV and AIDS or with other vulnerable children;
- Regard children as active social actors and have some experience of this approach;
- Have staff members who respect children as “social actors” and who are willing to act as facilitators of processes and not “depositing teachers” whose job it is to fill the empty minds of children who know nothing;
- Have some concrete experience in participatory project planning and implementation, preferably with children.

Suggestions

- Make children aware of their own existing strengths and achievements, and explore their experience in cooperation. This will form sound foundations.
- Capacity building of the children (and of staff members, e. g. in child participatory facilitation or on child development) is an ongoing and crucial factor.
- Training should answer the needs of children – consultation of children before designing a training can help to accommodate these needs.
- The balance between children's power and rights and the expectations and limits set by the adults (staff, leaders, patrons etc.) is volatile and has to be permanently negotiated. Allow children to contribute to these rules and to “own them”. Additionally, the level of this balance is likely to be different to the degree of autonomy the children are allowed for instance at home or at school.
- All human beings learn most efficiently by doing. This is also true when encouraging children to build their own organisation. Guide, delegate and hold back as much as possible!

Resources

- 1.** The paper, “To think together about an organisation for orphans” (Madoerin K, 2000) is the script for a one-week workshop that was held at the beginning of VSI. It contains the results of the discussion with the children. The process started with a deliberate reflection about the existing strength of the orphaned children.
- 2.** The paper, “VSI Replication Guidelines” (Madoerin K, 2006), contains a detailed description of the steps of the VSI replications in Nshamba area (from 6 clusters to 17 clusters).
- 3.** Finally the famous “ladder of participation” by R. Hart has been enlarged and reviewed by Nandana Reddy and Kavita Ratna into “Scenarios of Adult–Children Engagement”. The paper describes 13 different stages of the relationship between children and adults.
- 4.** Save the Children Children's Participation in OVC Programming (2004), Resource Sheet 4 (Best Practice Guidelines from the Field), is a useful resource in the start-up phase.

TOPIC 3: Structure And Organisational Life



Themidius Theonest

(boy, 17), Deputy secretary, Nshamba

Themidius: I was elected this year, 2008, as a leader of the Nshamba VSI cluster. Last year I was responsible for organising the agricultural activities of those members who have agricultural projects. Therefore many members know me. I entered Rafiki Mdogo when I was nine years old so I've spent nearly half of my life as part of this child organisation!

Nshamba cluster has 183 members. We meet normally four times per month and two of these meetings deal with agriculture. I have different tasks. Sometimes I have to write the minutes of the meetings. If one member of the cluster has a special problem, I have

to communicate with the caretaker from the office. When we have common work to do, for example constructing a house, I have to organise the children. And then I have to attend twice per month the internal meeting with the other five leaders of the cluster where we discuss problems presented by VSI members. We prepare the cases for the discussion in the general meeting. We can make proposals as leaders, but the final decisions are taken in the meeting.

Why they elected me? I think that the other members have observed that I regularly attended the meetings, and that I was very committed within VSI. It is a little bit of a "love story". We visit each other, I care about other members when they are sick, and we sleep in the house overnight if somebody has lost a relative. They know that they can meet me and that I communicate their concerns with the other leaders or with HUMULIZA. I like the cooperation which exists between us which makes me and all of us strong.



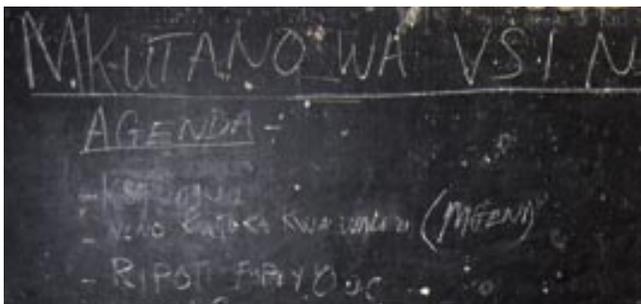
Fidelius Laurian

(boy, 17), secretary in Nshamba cluster

Fidelius: Since 2003 I have been in VSI and last year (2007) I was elected as secretary of our cluster. As a leader you have to be familiar with the members so you can help to identify their situation. As an example, one young child, whom I will call Justin, lost his mother last year. He lives now with his brother. I saw him several times just roaming around and I started to investigate. Due to the death of his mother, Justin didn't see any sense to go to school and he stopped schooling. I went to talk to him and I managed to convince him to return to school. As a leader you have to be kind with the members, to be close to them and to love them. Especially the

younger ones who are new to VSI, those who are 13 or 14 years old, need special attention so that they are not “overridden” by the elder members, especially by the elder boys. We have also younger leaders – the youngest is 15 years old. In the meeting I try to be attentive and to watch if one of the younger members tries to raise the hand, but she or he hesitates – then we try to give him or her “the floor” that is the opportunity to speak. I try to be polite to new members, to welcome them and to thank them for their contribution. And if they raise an issue which is not on the agenda, I make it sure that we discuss it later. Also we welcome them in the games so they feel comfortable with the older members.

Finally girls often need special encouragement. Usually we form discussion groups of four: two girls and two boys, and for reporting we request one girl and one boy to report. We have also mixed play teams, even for football.



Malisiana Stanislaus
(girl, 18)

Malisiana: Since 2001 I am in VSI. I have seen different leaders. I think to be a good leader you must have a good behaviour. Good behaviour means that you are trustful, that you are honest, that you don't humiliate the members, and that you listen carefully to them. We elected six leaders, three are girls and three are boys.

The leaders contact you for meetings but they give also advice. I was for example advised when I came late to the meetings. Once I had a friend with bad behaviours. The chairman of our cluster talked to me that this can have a bad influence on me. The chairman explained me why he was thinking like this and I could see the reason behind his explanations. Also the chairman is a friend of mine, and I trust him. So I stopped the relationship with this other girl. It never happened that we had to chase a leader for bad behaviour. If

something happen, for example that the leader would give priority to his or her friends, then we would report it to our caretaker who is an experienced old VSI member, and we would try to solve the problem.

It is true that girls sometimes are too shy to speak. They ask the neighbour to talk for them. It happens that the leader cuts people off too early when they feel that it is not contributing to the topic. This can happen to younger boys and girls, but even when girls become older, it still happens to them.



Rereading the interviews

“We can make proposals as leaders, but the final decisions are taken in the meeting”, says Themidius, Deputy Secretary from the Nshamba cluster. Many leaders of organisations are not very concerned about democratic legitimisation. They often consider their position as a means to get extra benefits and as a tool to uplift friends and family members. VSI has also had its fair share of growing pains and has experienced cases of fraud and abuse of power.

The VSI members have quite a clear understanding of the quality of a leader and the reason someone might be elected. Themidius tells us he has been an “activist” (with agriculture) – “therefore many members know

me". His testimony also reveals that he is aware of his communication and interactive style and he describes his relationship with the members "a little bit as a love story". It is touching that the word "love" (kishwahili Upendo) appears as a qualification of a good leader. Leaders perceive themselves (and are perceived) to be familiar with the members and to feel responsible for their wellbeing. Malisiana tells in her story how the chairman was worried about a relationship she had, and Fidelius refers to a child who after the loss of his mother started roaming around. Leaders have to be kind, good listeners, not arrogant, trustful, honest and close to the members – quite a high expectation! Will they – the leaders and the members – with their learning process on and around participatory and democratic leadership influence the African civil society of tomorrow?

Malisiana makes it clear that the process of overcoming traditions is not easy. She observes that girls in general, and younger children of both sexes, have more difficulty being heard. It is one of the characteristics of a child-led organisation that the membership is fluid. The older children leave, or have to leave, and younger children enter the organisation. How to give voices to these younger ones? Fidelius seems to be aware of these culturally conditioned limitations. He advises that one watch carefully for signs from the younger



ones expressing that they want to contribute (but still hesitating to raise their hands fully) and then encourage them to speak. It is in fact not easy for a 13- or 14-year old child to speak in front of a group of maybe 100 other children.

Fidelius confirms Malisiana's observation that it is more difficult for girls to speak than for boys. In the early days of the VSI it was not easy for a girl to become elected as a leader. This has since changed. The leaders in Malisiana's cluster are in parity: three boys and three girls. This is the result of the internal policy of VSI to practice gender parity in all trainings. Nevertheless

for election no compulsory parity has been proposed. Often the cashiers are girls and it is my understanding that this reflects a bigger confidence of the members in the honesty of the female members. Fidelius reports that facilitation and reporting in the meetings follow often the "zip-system" where one girl and one boy are called for reporting.

Malisiana refers to the mechanism in use if there is a case of for example, favouritism by the leaders. It seems that these mechanisms work to solve minor conflicts and to nip serious violations and abuse of power in the bud – she doesn't remember that it was ever necessary to dismiss a leader.

However the following experience illustrates democracy in work within the organisation, the role of the patron organisation HUMULIZA, and a firm commitment to gender parity. In April 2002, members in three clusters requested changes in their leadership. HUMULIZA took the opportunity to begin an election process in all the clusters, keeping the option open for the re-election of the old leaders and/or the election of new ones. Some candidates were elected almost unanimously, and on occasion, a second ballot was needed to finalise the candidate for some functions. About one-third of the elected leaders were female, with the youngest elected leader being just 13 years old.

Some lessons learned

During the preparation of the VSI evaluation, eight groups of VSI members were requested to identify questions they would like to have explored by the evaluation team. One task given to the evaluators was to explore issues around democratic leadership, in particular, if girls and boys both feel empowered.

This issue was explored through a story of a hypothetical boy who had joined an orphan organisation that was run in an undemocratic manner. VSI members were asked to say how VSI was different from this hypothetical group. The response was overwhelming. All groups agreed that VSI was quite different from this organisation because:

- The VSI has goals and rules and both – leaders and members – follow these rules.
- All members air their views and these are listened to. The questions they ask are well answered such that members become satisfied that a leader has responded.
- “In our group we have co-operation and love between leaders and members” seemed to be a common sentiment.
- “VSI recognises children to an extent that we regard them as if we are of the same age and value.” This translates quite a modern understanding of

“membership” without restriction of age or gender.

- There is a strong feeling of ownership. On the question “Who runs the VSI?” the evaluators got answers like “Ourselves” and “VSI members”.

The election of the six leaders in each cluster plays a crucial role for ownership. HUMULIZA gives the election, which is on a majority basis, a prominent role. The members nominate candidates. Normally there are more candidates than posts so that there is a true selection. In the formative evaluation one member said: “If we want to elect a chairperson we know those who fit for us.”

The preparation of the leaders is also crucial. The political environment doesn't show much in the way of role models for democratic leadership. Often Tanzanian leaders behave in authoritarian ways and look out mostly for their own benefit. In this context the training of the leaders has become critical. The three-day training is a mixture of personal reflection (Why I want to become a leader? What are my fears? What personal qualities will help me to become a good leader?), and development of skills (e.g. facilitation skills). (See resources)

The HUMULIZA team has had to find a good balance between effective delegation of power to the clusters, and support for the leaders. In order to strengthen

the supportive function, HUMULIZA has introduced – after discussions with the VSI – the system of “caretakers”. Two older Ex-VSI members for each cluster, appointed by HUMULIZA, serve as support for the leaders in the cluster and as a liaison between the clusters and the HUMULIZA office. That they have also some tasks of controlling – especially for financial matters – makes their position sometimes difficult and can lead to conflicts.

Suggestions

- Facilitate and support the children to create their own rules and the structures for the implementation of these rules once the rules have been accepted.
- Transparency on all levels is crucial. Help the children to create procedures which are simple but effective.
- Help the children to create structures and channel for complaints and dissatisfaction and encourage them to use these structures.
- Help the children to create structures and procedures for conflict resolution.

Resources

1. “The VSI Training in leadership” (Madoerin K, 2002) contains training guidelines and four handouts for a three-day training.

TOPIC 4: Loss Of Caregivers



Dionisia Augustine
(girl, 16), Nshamba

Dionisia: I lost my mother two months ago. She was sick for a long time. She suffered from high blood pressure. My father died a long time ago and I didn't know him. I now live with my elder brother and my younger sister. I'm very sad. It is difficult to say where I miss my mother specifically, it is everywhere.

My elder brother advised me and my younger sister to join VSI so we can buy some maize flour which helps us to get food. We have been in VSI for one month now and I have attended a few meetings. Maybe attending the meetings and listening to the ideas of the

others can help me. A few members came and offered their condolences when they heard that I had lost my mother.

I have five close friends, Justa, Mariam, Hopeness, Anita and Nusura. Anita and Nusura are also in the VSI. I talked with Anita. She told me how she was very depressed when her mother died, and how some VSI members comforted her and helped her to cope. She lives now with neighbors taking care of her younger siblings. When I'm very sad, I talk to my brother. I can feel some small changes since I started in the VSI. For instance I can sleep again, but I have many dreams about my late mother. I'm schooling in Standard Seven, next year I might join the secondary school if I pass the examination. I concentrate much in the class and try to forget what has happen to me.



Flora Aloys
(girl, 15), Mulera, who lost a caretaker a long time ago

Flora: My father died in 2002, when I had just started school. He was already very old. He was only sick for a short time then he died. I loved him. We laughed a lot together, every day. And when I needed something like exercise books for school, or the uniform when I entered in Standard I, or clothes, he was always ready to help me. He did good things for me. My mother is fortunately still alive.

After my father's death, I joined VSI. We get a certain amount every month. This helps me a lot, so I can

buy soap or body oil. It is also helpful to know that all the other members have lost either their father or the mother or even both. We share all of us the same experiences – how life becomes difficult, especially when the father dies, even if we don't talk explicitly about it. You should just have seen how we were struggling day after day, for school material, for clothes, for food.

Anyway, I would invite other children who have lost the father or the mother to join us, it would help them to forget about the person he died.



Gilbert Sospiter

(boy, 17), *Itongo, Std 6, caring for his sick grandmother for two years*

Gilbert: In 2002 my mother died, and in 2006 my father died. After the death of my father I had to move to my grandmother, the mother of my late father. She



lives with my half-sister who is mentally troubled. She can help in the household but it is difficult for her to plan the work. My grandmother and I cared for my father when he got sick. His wife, the second wife, left him when he started to suffer. It was very heavy to care for your own father and to see how he is getting weaker and weaker.

My grandmother was already somehow sick, when my father died but since his death she got really sick – pressure, fever, and pains in the joints. She can't walk. My father supported her much, he was her youngest child. Now I'm heading the family, also caring for my grandmother besides going to school. I would suffer more if there would be no VSI. In the meetings they have decided several times to support me from the funds we have in the cluster – for food, for school material or for the uniform. When our field got overcrowded with weeds, other VSI members came to help me with the weeding. Some of them, who have had the same experience of loss, try also to console me. They advised me to read or to be active, so I can be open for other ideas. And the caretaker of the cluster visits me and we discuss about what happened and what I feel about it.



Rereading the interviews

"I'm very sad. It is difficult to say where I miss my mother specifically – it is everywhere," says Dionisia. To lose parents is for each child a deeply shocking event. In most cases, this loss amounts to losing their most close and trusted caregivers. Erna Furman says, "When his parent dies, a child finds himself in a unique situation because of the special nature of his ties to the deceased. An adult distributes his love among several meaningful relationships – his spouse, family members, children, friends, and colleagues. The child, by contrast, invests almost all his feelings in his parents. Except in very unusual circumstances, this single relationship is therefore incomparably rich and intense, unlike any close adult relationship." (*A Child's Parent Dies*, 1974, p.12).

The death of the male caretaker usually has a deep impact on the economic situation. Flora remembers how her father provided her with her basic needs. It is no surprise then that even the little material support from the VSI is much appreciated and buffers the bitter consequences of the loss: "We get a certain amount every month. This helps me a lot – so I can buy soap or body oil," says Flora.

Dionisia is totally honest when she tells is that she joined VSI mainly for this reason, "so we can buy some maize flour". Some children or adolescents – like

Gilbert – are suddenly confronted with the whole responsibility of a household. He tells us: “Now I’m heading the family.” The VSI members of Itongo, where Gilbert lives, acknowledge his difficult situation and support him with additional money for food and school needs and helped him to weed the field.

Gilbert and others refer to the psychosocial support that is available and forthcoming from peers within VSI. He says, “Some of them, who have had the same experience, try also to console me.”

For Flora it is comforting to see that she is not alone in her grief and her loss. She tells us, “It is also helpful to know that all the other members have lost either their father or the mother or even both. We share all of us the same experiences how life become difficult.”

And Dionisia, who has only been in VSI for a few months, begins to feel slight changes and starts to sleep again, to forget and to be able to concentrate in class once again.

Gilbert tells us that “the caretaker of the cluster visits me and we discuss about what happen and what I feel about it” but also that his friends from VSI advised him “to read or to be active, so I can be open for other ideas”. At no point are children whose caretakers have died,

singled out, forced to grieve, express their loss, get the pain off their chests.

“Forgetting” seems to be an important coping strategy for these children. And they are not alone. Research in Kagera with elderly revealed the immense importance of “forgetting” and returning to “normality”. Members from VSI help their peers to forget, but without pushing aside or “tabooing” expressions of grief. Thus we see clearly that with respect to loss and grieving, a child or youth-led organisation provides opportunities for catharsis as well as for normalisation.

Some lessons learned

HUMULIZA was founded in 1997 as a project aiming explicitly to give psychosocial support to orphaned children. For this reason a group intervention approach was developed and addressed the emotional distress of bereaved children whilst also seeking to develop life skills. For the structured group approach, in each group about 20 children participated in a one-morning sessions for 15 weeks. One of the “modules” of this intervention specifically addresses grief and loss. However this module and the structured group approach were not a stand-alone intervention. The intervention was offered to severely affected and distressed children within the broader context of their participation within their own child- and youth-led organisation.

Peta Hemmings (1995) likens the life of children after the loss of their parents to “looking through shuttered glass”. She emphasises the need for peer groups of bereaved children to help support and normalise each other’s experiences. “A bereaved child feels different from her peers. Her experience of death and her knowledge of bereavement set her apart from her friends” (Interventions with bereaved children, 1995, p.17).

In the formative evaluation VSI members were eloquent about their own grief and echoed Hemmings’ statement.

“I had different views from others”, “I thought or felt differently from other people”, “I was separate from friends of mine”, “to be always unhappy and to think on suicide”, “keeping silent and therefore laughed at school”.

Speaking about the “before” and “after” about joining VSI, the children describe a way back to an emotionally normal life which involves having friends, distraction from sadness, entertaining hope, and finding acceptance. In terms of normalisation, the fact that the organisation is principally comprised of orphaned children, is clearly important for the members.

An explanation why a child-led organisation of orphans is so efficient in order to produce normalisation can

perhaps be explained by Robert Jay Lifton in *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (1979). He postulates that “death” is “present” from birth and accompanies us throughout our life and he identifies three main emotions (or death equivalents) associated with loss and grief, namely feelings of separation, disintegration and immobilisation. However, these three basic feelings of “death equivalent” have a “counterpart” connected with life, vitality and confirmation, which are feelings of connection and continuity, feelings of integration, and feelings of purposiveness and movement.

The VSI members described both – the “before VSI” and the “after VSI” – in terms that are very close to those proposed by Lifton. Being part of the VSI means to be connected, to experience continuity, to be integrated and to be on the move again, feelings which, according to Lifton, represent life.

We can assume that the (little) economic support together with the practical skills (such as agriculture, trainings etc) play an important role on this path of normalisation. Having access to soap, being clean and getting practical skills restores dignity and social acceptability. It also allows the children to free inner energy for the mourning process as not all energy is directed to the struggle for survival.

In addition, merely the opportunity to play and enjoy activities such as ball playing and singing together was another reason for the change towards normalisation – especially important for the younger children from the Rafiki Mdogo. Due to the pressing survival needs of households and the vital labour tasks performed by children (collecting firewood, water, cleaning the home, cooking etc.), without VSI and Rafiki Mdogo – and in the wake of HIV and AIDS and grinding poverty – these children would have severely reduced opportunities for play.

Suggestions

- Condolences “by children to children” play an important role in mourning and they connect children in the case of loss. HUMULIZA observed that children never received condolences. VSI created the procedures to provide this “missing link” for children in the public acknowledgment of loss and grief.
- Even small material contributions which last over a certain period help to significantly decrease the distress connected with the loss of caretakers.
- Although the child-led organisation (if members have experienced personal losses) has been proved to be very supportive in grief support it helps if there are staff members and some children who are specially trained in grief counselling in order to support very distressed children.

Resources

The “Group Intervention Approach” (www.humuliza.org) has been developed by Kurt Madoerin and adapted and enlarged by Bev Killian. It is an application of the child-to-child approach, recognising that children can act as important resources among themselves. The child-to-child-approach in mutual counselling – as a social technique – was developed recently and is used primarily in programs that target working children, children who live on the street, and children infected with HIV/AIDS in developing countries. In Europe and the United States, it is used in programs that focus on children of divorced parents and for HIV/AIDS peer counseling.

1. Principles and objectives
2. List of the sessions
3. Guidelines for the 15 sessions.

“Children and Grief: When a parent dies” is a chapter of a training manual on Psychosocial support written by K. Madoerin (available at www.humuliza.org). It draws much insight from authors such as Warden and from the “Child Bereavement Study”, as well as African sources.

TOPIC 5: Economic Strengthening



EVANCE KAIZA

Evance Kaiza

(boy, 19), Kagazi, four years in the VSI

Evance: My younger sister Diana and I decided to start a small business. We investigated what could be profitable and we found that producing firewood is a good thing. We asked VSI for a loan of 10'000 Shilling (about US\$10). With the loan we bought trees. If the tree is small, we have to pay 1'000 Shilling (about US\$1), for bigger trees you need to pay up to 2'000 Shillings (about US\$2). Then I had to cut the tree and to cut it in pieces. Diana helped to bring the pieces to our house which is where we sell them. We sell four pieces of firewood for 200 shilling.

But Diana is also looking for clients in Nshamba, for example small restaurants which need firewood. It is easy to find clients because everybody has to cook! From the first loan we got some profit. Then we repaid the loan. Part of the profit we used to buy soap, kerosene and food, also for our brothers and mother. Part of the profit we invest in our business – we can buy more trees. In a good month we can earn up to 3–4000 Shillings (about US\$3 to US\$4), in a bad month it is only 2'000 Shillings (about US\$2). In 2006 we asked for another loan of 20'000 Shillings (about US\$20) in order to increase our capital. This we are now paying back.



REVOKATUS - PASCHAL

Revokatus Pascal

(boy, 17), in the VSI since 2003 (after having been in the Rafiki Mdogo)

Revokatus: I live with my grandmother Yustina Mkemba, with three elder brothers and one younger brother. My elder brothers work as day labour, if they find the chance. One helps to slaughter the cows for the butchery – he gets 500 Shillings (\$0.5) for it each day.

Every month I'm getting 1'500 Shilling (\$1.5) from the VSI. I use it to buy kerosene, soap and salt, for our family, and to cut the hair. We are supposed to get 1'800 Shilling, but 300 Shilling are deducted for different funds. In fact, each VSI member gets this monthly support as

a recompense for the work we do for the elderly who have no other support. I supported Cecilia, but she died two months ago. She was my neighbour. I brought her water and firewood once a week. Now I have to look for another old person. Others in VSI are not helping the old people, but getting the money. I think there might be only one-third of the VSI members who are really helping. If VSI would be closed, I would feel very bad. It would be a big backlash. Everything depends on the VSI. Even when I'm sick, the VSI helps me to go to the hospital.



Alex Emanuel

(boy, 19), Kabirizi, in the VSI since 2003

Alex: We have three group funds in VSI, the emergency fund, the savings, and the OVC fund. The office deducts from each member each month 300 Shillings which goes into the funds. Additionally each member contributes 50 Shillings to the OVC fund.

The emergency fund and the savings are there for smaller requests and expenses. When we help to construct a house, we take the money for the food for meals while we are working from that fund. Or if there is an individual problem e.g. lack of school materials, then the member can write a request to the leaders. They will be presented at the meeting to all members who will decide upon the request – i.e. if and how much money will be used. Maybe half of the requests are accepted. There are always children that try also to cheat. Each cluster has four elected adult caretakers – they know the situation of each child and can also give their opinion. If the application is accepted the leaders write a letter to the office, signed by the caretaker. Then three leaders – among them the cashier – go to the office to fetch the money.

The OVC-fund is for bigger expenses – e.g. if somebody's house has burnt or destroyed by the storm, or child-headed households that have not enough food.

It doesn't happen often, that money is 'eaten'. Only once the attendant of the Rafiki Mdogo spent money for his own needs but it was soon detected. We found that he had a mental problem and we arranged medicine for him, so he got cured and works very well with the Rafiki Mdogo.



Rereading the interviews

The interviews cover three areas of economic support for the VSI members:

- Small loans for income generation. The loans are paid to groups, each group member can get US\$5 as the first loan. After having paid back they can apply for the double amount.
- Monthly cash transfer (called "slip payment") of a small amount (US\$1.5) paid "against" social activities – mainly support of the elderly who have lost their children.
- A collective security system in the form of three funds in each cluster which is administrated by the VSI members. The Saving Fund can accumulate up to US\$200–400).

The interviews clearly show the role of the different interventions to contribute to satisfy basic needs and to operate as an individual and collective risk management system. Additionally it helps to develop solidarity within the family and contribute towards the social recognition of the children.

"Business people" Evance and Diana demonstrate how they use their profits for basic needs and are even able to turn a profit with the small loan, reinvest the money in more trees for firewood and even repay the initial loan which qualified them for an even bigger one!

Alex articulately explains the role of the various funds: “The OVC fund is for bigger expenses – e.g. if somebody’s house has burned or destroyed by the storm, or for child headed households that have not enough food.” The other two funds are for support in smaller cases: “If there is an individual problem e.g. lack of school materials then the member can write a request to the leaders.”

An important function of the economic activities and of a child- and youth-led organisation in general is not just to receive handouts but to learn to “master life” and to acquire practical life skills by doing. Evance and his sister Diana have developed entrepreneurial skills in selecting a profitable activity, planning, reinvesting, organising the marketing and so on.

Also on the collective level children learn to engage and make decisions around financial questions. Alex tells us, “Individual requests “will be presented at the meeting to all members who will decide upon the request i.e. if and how much money will be used. Maybe half of the requests are accepted. There are always children that try also to cheat.” Alex seems to be satisfied that they get support from adults in making these sometimes difficult decisions: “Each cluster has four elected adult caretakers – they know the situation of each child and can also give their opinion.”



Control of the money flow is crucial – clear procedures try to create a maximum climate of transparency: “If the application is accepted the leaders write a letter to the office, signed by the caretaker. Then three leaders – among them the cashier – go to the office to fetch the money.”

Fraud is not unknown, but also not frequent. Alex reports one case of his village – and also the solution: “It doesn’t happen often, that money is ‘eaten’. Only once the attendant of the Rafiki Mdogo spent their

money on his own – but it was soon detected. We found that he had a mental problem and we arranged medicine for him – so he got cured and works very good with the Rafiki Mdogo”.

Revokatus recognises the role of even these small amounts in his fight against marginalisation and impoverishment: “If the VSI would be closed, I would feel very bad. It would be a big backlash. Everything depends on the VSI. Even when I’m sick, the VSI helps me to go to the hospital.”

Some lessons learned

In the last years we have gained a deeper understanding of the connection between material and psychosocial wellbeing. Lucie Cluver (“Caregiving arrangements and psychological distress amongst children orphaned by AIDS in South Africa”, 2007) demonstrated that orphaned children in child-headed households are performing as well as orphaned children living with caretakers but only if they are economically supported and if the stigma that they exposed to is managed and reduced. The KwaWazee impact assessment (Stefan Hofmann et.al., “Salt, soap and shoes for school”, 2008) noted a significant difference in psychosocial wellbeing between grandchildren whose grandmothers receive a monthly pension, and grandchildren from the control group whose grandmothers are not yet in the program. Similar conclusions on the psychosocial impact of economic deprivation are suggested in three studies from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi (Safids News 1998, Vol 6/4). In these studies they found a strong sense of hopelessness and fatalism amongst adolescents with a lower economic status, less so among the affluent. The actual rise of food prices and general living costs will certainly increase the pressure on children and households affected by HIV and AIDS.



Another lesson we learnt in the last years is about economic citizenship of children and their right to earn and to own money. Million of children struggle for their survival and support their caretakers and siblings, but instead of acknowledging their efforts, they often are exploited, blamed and denied access to economic resources. Such access forms a major source of protection for children.

HUMULIZA and VSI operate on different levels, providing the possibility for saving and for loans and practising a cash transfer program of a small amount

directly to children. The micro-loan program is quite challenging because the children have to pay back the loan – either in cash or in kinds. Training and monitoring is crucial in order to make the program successful and to avoid that children incur a negative experience of failure. In the formative evaluation the VSI (op cit) members identified reasons for failures in their economic projects. Two of the main reasons given were where children have spent the money (either loan of profit) on other basic needs instead of putting the money back into the business, and where they failed to sell their products due to inaccurate reading of market demand.

Betty Wilkinson (“Microfinance Service in the Context of AIDS orphans”, University of Maryland, 1999) noted – in another context – some criteria to be considered when an organisation decides to step into microfinance:

- Do vulnerable children have enough resources to grow food to eat? If not, they will use loan funds for this purpose.
- Do the children's group have sufficient labour to ensure the economic activity can be properly undertaken – beside the school and other commitments?
- Do the children have sufficient understanding of how to run the economic activity?

- Do the children's group have sufficient control over the cash, and understanding of the difference between cash inflow and profits?

The list shows the challenges for any organisation dealing with microfinance. Some criteria can be met by careful training and monitoring and using a group approach, other (such as having enough food) will remain an obstacle to repayment.

The fact that the material support is not given as a "handout" is important; rather it is given in a way that increases the sense of control and competence of the young people by allowing them to contribute to the other members (funds) and through helping them generate their own income. The very process of giving material support is integrated with a process that will increase emotional wellbeing. Children reflected this in the impact evaluation: they described themselves as feeling proud, living on their own, supporting others (especially younger siblings), investing for earning potential and they concluded: "Our families are happy with us."

If the organisation has no funds for cash transfer it might be possible to find additional donors interested in social protection and depending on contextual factors, a child- and youth-led organisation can exist without this component.



Suggestions

- Regular cash transfers – even if they add up to only small amounts – have a clear impact on the physical and psychosocial wellbeing of children.
- Group-based activities (e.g. for loans in cash or kind) offer a bigger possibility for successful implementation of loans.
- Training in financial management, basic business skills and in the area of business for which they need the loan, adapted to local conditions and at the children's level of understanding, is crucial, and should be accompanied by good monitoring. All pitfalls which might lead to potential failures should be removed. Failures are poison for the growth of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Resources

1. The document "Children and Money" – (Madoerin K, 2006) describes experiences with cash transfer and with offering loans and savings to children. The material comes from the VSI (Tanzania) and Vision Plan (Kenya).
2. "Economic Strengthening for Vulnerable Children" (USAID, SC, AED, FIELD No 2, 2008) deals more with technical recommendations for economic strengthening of the caretakers of vulnerable children than of the children themselves.

TOPIC 6: Friendship



Peter Belinard
(boy, 20), Rubya

Peter: For four years I was a member of VSI, since the beginning when VSI started in Rubya. Today I am the liaison person between the Rubya cluster and the office. They call me a 'caretaker'. I have three very close friends, Elidius, Valence and Jacklin. They are all in VSI. Why are they my friends? We share the same problems we are fighting. They give me advice. If I have some money to spend, I can discuss with them and they help me to make good decisions. Once my shirt was dirty and one of my friends told me to go to buy soap. Elidius is now a peer educator for prevention, also Jacklin is a peer educator. So we used to work together,

because I also did prevention work in Rubya. With Valence I have a long story. We started VSI together in Rubya, we did the English course together, and now we study in the Secondary School together.

Of course we also discuss our relationships with girls, but I feel that it is important now to settle my life. I think that good friends respect each other and listen to each other and exchange ideas. Another important thing is to support each other, for example with small loans or to attend a session for the other when this one is not able to do it. We give each other hope that we one day will become someone. I have also a few friends in the village who are not part of VSI but I have less contact with them.



Asimwe Petro

(girl, 17), Nshamba, started with Rafiki Mdogo and has been in VSI for 5 years

Asimwe: I have two very close friends, both are girls. We help each other if one of us has a problem. For instance my friend can accompany me when I have to go somewhere. Or when I have to pay the tuition and I have no money, then they can give me a small loan which I pay back later. And at school they explain to me the lessons if I haven't understood.

My friends are not in the VSI. I had two additional friends from the VSI but one of them used harsh words. She told me that she would like to fight with me and started

to quarrel with my other VSI friend. So I got annoyed and I left them and stayed with my two old friends.

But I see that the VSI can really help you to make friends. There is a lot of cooperation. We put our energy and efforts together in order to be successful. I can rely on the VSI. If I have a problem I can tell this to friends and leaders in VSI and I can trust that the VSI members will help me if they have the means to do it. This is our rule. And this gives a mutual appreciation which is a good foundation to construct friendships. If you have constructed a house for somebody, they will appreciate you. And I appreciate other members because I know that they will support me when I'm in trouble.



Evelius Leopold

(boy, 10), Kigemo, been in Rafiki Mdogo for 1 year

Evelius: I have six very close friends, Anecta, Brian, Kevin, Eric, Evan and Flavio. We often play together, mostly football. Or we dance. Then Anecta beats the drum. He is a very good drummer. And sometimes we make music, we sing songs that we learnt or we heard from the radio, and sometimes we make our own song. All my friends are with me in Rafiki Mdogo, except Kevin, he is the child of my elder sister.

Before I joined Rafiki Mdogo, I had also friends, but only few. In Rafiki Mdogo it is easy to make friends. You play together and then you tell your name. So you know the names of every Rafiki Mdogo member. The children in Rafiki Mdogo are kind, they don't fight against each other. This makes me happy because I don't like fighting.

We also talk together. When something happens and I can't join the Rafiki Mdogo meeting, then my other friends inform me what has happened in the meeting. Maybe somebody has lost a relative and we have to bring something to them. Without my friends I wouldn't know it.



Rereading the interviews

In her research, Lucie Cluver (Cluver L & Gardner F, "The psychological wellbeing of children orphaned by AIDS in Cape Town, South Africa", *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 2006) found no significant difference in overall peer problems between children orphaned by AIDS and non-orphans except in one single instance, namely, "have one good friend or more". Her findings shows that 97% of children orphaned by AIDS perceive themselves as having no close friends, maybe as an outcome of stigma and self-stigmatisation.

Friendship is a crucial theme in VSI and Rafiki Mdogo, and this theme also pervades other interviews where we didn't specifically enquire around friendship. Asimwe highlights this theme and the importance of friendship within VSI when she says, "We put our energy and efforts together in order to be successful. I can rely on the VSI. If I have a problem I can tell this the VSI and I can trust that the VSI members will help me if they have the means

to do it. This is our rule. This gives a mutual appreciation which is a good foundation to construct friendships.”

And 10 year-old Evelius from Rafiki Mdogo says: “Before I joined the Rafiki Mdogo, I had also friends, but only few. In the Rafiki Mdogo it is easy to make friends.” What is perhaps the key is the basis upon which these friendships are built. Solid friendships are best built on common interests and common pursuits. The three interviews show a large range of activities which forms the basis of their relationships:

- “We used to work together (as peer educator), because I also did prevention work in Rubya.” (Peter)
- “Together we formed VSI, we did the English course together, and now we study in the secondary school together.” (Peter)
- “We help each other if one of us got a problem. For instance my friend can accompany me when I have to go somewhere” (Asimwe)
- “At school they explained me the lessons if I hadn’t understood.” (Asimwe)
- “We also talk together. When something happens and I couldn’t join the Rafiki Mdogo meeting, then the other friends inform me what has happened in the meeting.” (Evelius)

The interviews also point to psychosocial and material support in the explicit form of peer support:

- “We share the same problems we are fighting.” (Peter)



- “We give each other hope that we one day will become someone.” (Peter)
- “We discuss also about our relationships with girls.” (Peter)
- “They give me advice. If I have some money to spend, I can discuss with them and they help me to make good decisions.” (Peter)
- “We support each other e.g. with small loans or to attend a session for the other when this one is not able to do it.” (Peter)
- “When I have to pay the tuition and I have no money, then they can give me a small loan which I pay back later.” (Asimwe)

And lastly, the interviews demonstrate how VSI and Rafiki Mdogo also allow children to be children and create time and space for them to play:

- “We often play together, mostly football. Or we dance. And sometimes we make music, we sing songs that we learnt or we heard from the radio, and sometimes we make our own song.” (Evelius)

It is also worth commenting on the testimonies of the children who report problems within VSI, in particular Asimwe who tells us that at the time of the interview she had no close friends in the VSI and had in fact “fallen out” with some friends within VSI.

The fact that she and others are able to maintain close friendships with children who are not VSI members is a very healthy and welcome phenomenon. A child- and youth-led organisation should not be a closed system or a “ghetto”. Nor should friendships and membership within this grouping supplant, destroy or replace other community-based structures.

Some lessons learned

Friendships are an awkward construct for a program to try and quantify or to set as objectives; however a program can provide good conditions for friendships to take root. A child- and youth-led organisation can also consciously attempt to create conditions in which to nurture friendships.

Much has been said in the different interviews about the “culture” of an organisation. If the daily practice of the internal culture is based on mutual respect, and respect toward younger children by older children and by adults, and if participation, acknowledgment and inclusion are core values and daily practices, then there is fertile soil for the growth of friendship.

It is imperative that child-led organisations take on and build themselves on these principles and values therefore it is no wonder that friendships mushroom in the VSI and among the Rafiki Mdogo. This was

confirmed in the VSI Impact Evaluation (op cit) which found that: “The first difference between Control and VSI Project group is that the young people in the Control group generally have between two or three friends, only. The VSI members, however, have more friends.” The same was found for Rafiki Mdogo.

The Impact Evaluation found another remarkable difference. Interactions with friends among the VSI and the Rafiki Mdogo extended beyond activities orchestrated by the organisations. These friendships, although formed within VSI and Rafiki Mdogo, extend and spill into the broader lives of the children, building houses together; fetching water; playing in common spaces and at school etc.

There is a lot of “community talk” in the industry and work surrounding orphans and vulnerable children. We hear about “community-based approaches” “community care”, “community mobilisation”, etc. Mostly the community is perceived as a geographical unit. However Fellin (“The Community and the Social Worker”, 1995) notes that “communities” may be characterised in terms of three dimensions, namely a functional spatial unit meeting sustenance needs, a unit of patterned social interaction, and a symbolic unit of collective identity. Based on this definition we can affirm that VSI and Rafiki Mdogo form a “community”

– spread across and within 19 villages, rich in varied patterns of social interaction, and with a clear feeling of togetherness and identity. In this sense these child- and youth-led organisations could modestly be called a community. In a less modest mood, VSI and Rafiki Mdogo might also be referred to as a social movement.

Suggestions

- Friendships are largely a natural and private matter and should not be approached too “scientifically” or “programmatically”. However, in order to promote opportunities for friendships, age-specific activities have to be carefully considered.
- Equipping children with some basic knowledge about how to deal with personal conflicts and about mediation can support them to have stable friendships.
- Don't forget that doing things together brings people together and to foster friendships. This is also true for children.

Resources

1. The Group Intervention Approach – Manual contains one session on this topic: Session E: Friendship.
2. Friendship: The Rafiki Mdogo Workbook also contains a session on this topic, directed at younger children (aged 7 to 12).

TOPIC 7: Prevention



Jacklin Johansen
(male, 22)

Jacklin: When I was eight years old, my father died of AIDS. This was and is still a strong experience motivating me to contribute to the reduction of HIV and AIDS and to make sure that those children who are affected because their parents are sick are not isolated.

I meet the children of Bugarama, Biiirabo, Kabare and Mubunda twice per month and we talk about HIV and AIDS and how to prevent the infection. Further we discuss about our body and its changes, about health and also how to care for sick parents. Unfortunately a

considerable number of children have parents suffering from AIDS.

I want to convince them to change behaviour which could harm them, especially not to have sex when you are not yet mature. I think they should wait until they have reached the age of 20 years. Or if they can't wait they should use condoms. But we don't provide them with condoms. Sometimes they ask difficult questions and I fail to answer. For example, if they ask how many virus are in the body of an infected person. I feel I should have more training. Additionally some replication areas are far away, you get very tired to run the bicycle up to Mubunda or Kabare, because our area is very hilly.



Malikiana Sebastian
(girl, 17), Mulera B

Malikiana: We meet every week, about 100 VSI members, with our peer educators Veronica and Tibesigwa. We learn and discuss what is helping us to keep ourselves healthy. Many people in the village are not good, it is not a safe environment. So we discuss different behaviours. Rape is not frequent, but it is there, I heard about it. Another topic is hygiene.

We meet all together, girls and boys. I would appreciate if sometimes we could meet only among the girls, together with Veronica. We girls have many things which are different and I would like to discuss it only

with girls. I attended a session in a place in Nshamba. They called the session 'Hip chai'. They talked about respect, about being clean, and about the environment. There was only one facilitator – while in the VSI we have more. Also the facilitator was an adult. I myself prefer a facilitator of our age. Veronica and Tibeswiga are as we are. With them we can exchange different ideas and experiences because they share with us the same experiences. So they can support us because they use the actual life while the facilitator from 'Hip chai' has to remember his former experiences and answer quite different on our concerns and problems.



Amina Athumani
(girl, 13), *Nshamba B*

Amina: Since 2003 I have been in Rafiki Mdogo. Soon I will change to VSI because I have reached 13 years. No – I have never heard that VSI members have

meetings where the talk is about AIDS and about how to keep ourselves safe. Also in Rafiki Mdogo we never talked about this. We talk more about our rights and our responsibilities.

I talk often with my mother, for example, I wanted to know more about the origin of my late father who came from Rwanda. I was unfortunately too young to know him. So she told me about him and showed me the only picture we have from my Dad. I can ask my mother if I want to know something about AIDS. I heard people talking that you can get the disease when you have sex with somebody. If we would have prevention lessons in Rafiki Mdogo, I would certainly ask if this is true that you can become infected when you have sex. Soon I will be in the VSI. I will like it very much if we get lessons on prevention – very much indeed.



Rereading the interviews

All three interviews indicate how children and youth are preoccupied concerning HIV and AIDS and that this interest can be used to deal with prevention in a powerfully participatory way. The motivation for participation in prevention discussions can come from a personal background. Jacklin mentions that “unfortunately a considerable number of children

have parents suffering from AIDS”. He himself has lost his father through AIDS. He tells us, “It was and is still a strong experience motivating me to contribute to the reduction of HIV and AIDS and to make sure that those children who are affected because their parents are sick are not isolated.”

Amina tells us: “I will like it very much if we get lessons on prevention – very much indeed.” It can also be a general fear of infection that drives children’s keen interest in this topic. Amina, a younger child from Rafiki Mdogo, draws our attention to the importance, power and potential of peer-based prevention. She can ask her mother when she wants to know something about AIDS but she also relies on gossip: “I heard people talking that you can get the disease when you have sex with somebody”. This points to a clear role for adults in a child-led organisation, i.e., harnessing and transforming gossip into responsible prevention information.

It is not clear how far the prevention within VSI is done in a more traditional way focusing on “good” and “bad” behaviour and appealing – as Jacklin does – to the VSI members to delay sexual experiences. It is not clear if he is aware of the critique of abstinence education that says that the approach ignores the fact that teenagers are sexually active and if this is the case, such

approaches fail children and youth by failing to give them accurate medical information or advice on safer sex. Jacklin admits that sometimes he feels somewhat out of his depth, “Sometimes they ask difficult questions and I fail to answer”, and he specifically requests more training in this area.

Malikiana raises an interesting point in her interview when she tells us that she wishes to meet in gender-segregated groups. She is obviously aware that girls and boys have different experiences and perspectives around sex and prevention. She has also obviously learnt to appreciate the value of the girls-only group as a safe space where you can share your personal feelings and ideas.

Malikiana confirms the value of peer education programs as a common means of addressing youth sexual and reproductive issues. She compares the VSI program to one session she attended in another organisation (Hip Chai) given by an adult and tells us that she prefers a same-age facilitator.

Some lessons learned

From our experiences we can confirm that even younger children have so many open questions around body, sexuality, relationship, and HIV and AIDS. Most of their knowledge comes from other children at



school or from children from the community – mostly half-knowledge or often even wrong information. They are however very open when it comes to talking about these issues once they have the opportunity. In the discussion around knowledge concerning sexual health and HIV and AIDS in the VSI evaluation, it became obvious that neither the relatives nor the school are considered as the place where they can put forward their burning questions. The quantitative data revealed a statistically significant difference in favour of VSI vs non-VSI members when measuring their knowledge of essential HIV and AIDS information. This might be as a result of the prevention work in VSI.

As mentioned in the interview, peer educators have special and easy access to as well as “street credibility” in relation to other children but often the peer educators are overburdened or out of their depth. Organisations that work with peer education have to assume responsibility to accompany, mentor and train peer educators in a very engaged way.

Prevention work is essentially to pass life skills to the children and youth. The WHO defines life skills as “abilities that help us to adapt and behave positively so that we can deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life” (Brinkmeyer C. “Life skill training”, 2005). Life skills embrace skills such as decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, communication, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. What makes life skill training special in a prevention program, is, that girls and boys need different life skills – and their life skills should be based on their gender identities (see more about this in topic 10: Self defense). This explains the need that prevention is done – at least partly – in separated groups of girls and boys. While girls have to become more skilled in clear decision making, boys might need to develop their interpersonal relationships and empathy.

The understanding of what a girl and a boy are supposed to do and how to behave (i.e. gender identities) is formed in a context and the child-led organisation itself is an important part of this context. There was, for example, a general rule in HUMULIZA that all training should be gender-balanced. This gender-sensitive organisational culture brought results. While in the first election one-third of the elected leaders were girls and no girl was elected as a chairperson, seven years later we find that half of the chairpersons are girls..... and all of this without quotas!

Again the VSI offers girls and boys many possibilities for cooperation – fields where companionship and mutual respect can be learned and practiced. Thus while solid evidence-based prevention work is called for in child- and youth-led organisations, the actual success of such work might depend as much on the fact that this work transpires within a broader context of participation, life skill development and peers and leaders who model “responsibility”.

What is also important is that male and female children can develop a modified picture of the opposite gender which provides the background for more effective (and more interesting) prevention work.

Suggestions

- Parents and guardians have to be informed, and preferably consulted, concerning prevention work. This will avoid children being blamed when they talk about themes which might be considered by the adults as “inappropriate”. This will also open ways of communication between the children and their caretakers.
- Prevention has to start at an early age and not only when children have become sexually active (which can start as early as 12 or 13 years).
- Prevention has to be done in an age-appropriate form.
- Prevention works (probably) most effectively if it is based on gender identities which allow one to address the specific concerns of girls and boys and to develop the adequate life skills. To form gender separated groups can support this objective.

Resources

1. Soon after having formed the VSI, the training of peer educators for sexual and reproductive health and prevention of HIV and AIDS was introduced. “Struggle for Life” (www.humuliza.org) was a one-week introduction for the future peer educators. The script was written by Kurt Madoerin.

2–5. In cooperation with a Tanzanian painter, John Kilaka, and the VSI, a training tool using the traditional Tingatinga paintings was developed. John Kilaka came to Nshamba and discussed the issues with the peer educators. Kurt Madoerin wrote the discussion guidelines for the “Kilaka Pictures”. The tool has proved to be very popular among the children and is today used in other countries.

6. Youthnet (www.fhi.org/youthnet) has produced a series of four-page prevention materials called YouthLens about the following themes: New resources, Condom and sexual active youth, Participatory learning, Abstinence and delayed sex, Non-consensual sex, HIV infected youth, Early marriage and adolescent girls, Boys and changing gender roles.

7. Child-to-Child has produced a very useful booklet Sexual health, HIV and AIDS (booklet 1 – booklet 2 should be available on the website) consisting of 5 parts (Teaching children about sexual health, HIV and AIDS, Information on sexual health, HIV and AIDS, Approaches to teaching sexual health, HIV and AIDS, Ideas for activities, Useful resources). The booklet gives ideas what can be done by peer educators.

TOPIC 8: Agriculture



Tumaini Felix
(girl, 17), Mugaba

Tumaini: I live in Mugaba with my grandparents and my younger sister. In 2006 I attended the Mobile Farm School. The course brought a number of changes in my life. I earn today some money and I can support the family, especially my 13 year-old sister who is schooling and needs exercise books and a school uniform. I learned a lot in the Mobile Farm School, for example to produce my own manure. If you have no money and no cows, you dig a hole, about 20 cm wide and fill it with soft leaves like *Thitonia*. After one week you can use it as manure. I also plant *Mucuna* and *Canavalia* which improves the soil and my grandfather can use

the leaves for feeding his cow. I cultivate a number of crops and vegetables, groundnuts, maize, cassava, maghimbi, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, mchicha (local spinach), onions and also carrots.

Different people from the VSI and also from the village asked me for advice, how to produce manure or how to use carrots. But also I get advice from them. One showed me the right distance for the basket compost to the plants. I feel very proud when people show their interest for my farming. Also my grandfather is proud of me. He gave me a big portion of his field which I can cultivate. He says that I make a big effort like fetching water for the irrigation of the vegetables, and he shows people my garden.



VERONICA FERDINAND

Veronica Ferdinand
(girl, 17), Mulera, VSI member since 2002

Veronica: I heard good things about the Mobile Farm School, that they learn how to cultivate and to produce manure. I heard it from Tumaini Felix who lives nearby and who went to the farm school. And I can see the difference. Formerly her bananas had no manure, now she produces her own manure through basket compost and the banana trees look better. Also she constructed a goat shed and has now two goats.

She taught me how to produce liquid manure. You need a drum. Then you look for soft leaves like *Titonia* which grows everywhere. You cut the leaves and soak

them in the water. After seven days you can start to use the liquid manure in your garden. But you shouldn't mix this manure with other manure.

I myself plant the cooking banana, mchicha (local spinach), cassava and carrots. I'm an attendant for Rafiki Mdogo. Dada Lightness taught the Rafiki Mdogo how to cultivate carrots. Now I tried to do it myself. Soon I can harvest them. I would like to join the Mobile Farm School, especially to learn more how to grow vegetables. Here we are not used to plant and eat vegetables. But because I study in the Secondary School I can't study in the farm School.



Devotha Patrick

(girl, 7), Ihangiro, Standard 2 pupil

Devotha: I don't remember when I joined Rafiki Mdogo but it is already a long time. We learn different things in the Rafiki Mdogo on good manners and how

to keep us healthy. We had until now no meetings about agriculture, but I learned from my aunt how to weed and how to plant tomatoes, groundnuts, maize and beans.

In Rafiki Mdogo we learned to rear rabbits. We have now seven rabbits at our place. We got the rabbits from Rafiki Mdogo and we have to return young rabbits so others can also start to rear them. We have already returned 7 rabbits, 2 to Victor from the office, 3 to the Robert from VSI, and 3 to Jovina. Jovina is from VSI and is our attendant. If we have a problem with the rabbits, then I can ask her for advice. I don't know if she attended the Mobile Farm School, I have never heard about it.

First the rabbits belonged to the whole group of the Rafiki Mdogo. They were supposed to bring food for the animals every day. But finally it is only me who cares about them. I give them leaves from the weeds, remaining food, leaves from sweet potatoes, and also sweet potatoes and the peels of the cooking banana. I do all the work therefore I'm now the owner of the rabbits.

If there would be some training in agriculture or animal rearing, I would certainly attend it.



Rereading the interviews

Tumaini attended the Mobile Farm School – a course of ten weeks on different subjects around agriculture and husbandry. She feels the impact in her life: “I earn today some money and I can support the family – especially my 13 year-old sister, who is schooling and needs exercise books or the school uniform.”

Veronica has not yet attended the Mobile Farm School, but she can see the difference since Tumaini graduated at the Mobile Farm School. The course benefited not only Tumaini, but also other VSI members and members of the community like Veronica to whom some of the knowledge has been transferred: “She [Tumaini] taught me how to produce liquid manure.”

Tumaini plants carrots and produces her own manure which is a new practice in the area and people of the village ask her for advice. At only 17 years of age and a female she is somehow a model farmer which has a big impact on her self-esteem: “I feel very proud when people show their interest in my farming.” Her grandfather also acknowledges her and gave her a portion of land.

On the general meeting of the VSI in 2007, the delegates of the 19 clusters were asked to identify the

biggest concerns of their members. Fourteen clusters reported food problems and the need for training in agriculture.

The Mobile Farm School takes note of the fact that the children have no money to buy expensive inputs. Therefore they teach low cost and sustainable methods, different forms of compost, liquid manure, use of green manure, use of nitrogen producing plants etc.

Devotha – a member of the Rafiki Mdogo – has not yet received training for vegetables, but the whole group started to rear rabbits. They get the rabbits free – as a loan – and they then have to return young rabbits: Devotha makes it clear that involving the whole group of over 50 young children can certainly have its difficulties – due to the larger group neglecting the rabbits, by default and due to her keen interest, she has become the owner of all the rabbits.

Some lessons learned

A number of studies emphasise the level of pessimism and hopelessness about their future among children who have lost their parents. “Africa’s Orphaned Generation” refers to a study in the Rakai District of Uganda asking nearly 2 000 children about their expectations for the future: “Some of the findings indicate that orphaned children are less optimistic

about their future: They not only expected to have shorter lives but also were less likely to want to be married or to have children” (UNICEF, Africa’s Orphaned Generation, 2004, p.30).

One of the long-term impacts of HIV/AIDS in the area of human capital is the loss of agricultural skills and knowledge which traditionally are transferred from parents to their children. Children assume farming and cattle-keeping tasks and acquire in this way the necessary skills and knowledge for their future lives as farmers and herders. The loss of parents means that many of these vulnerable children face a bleak future without any or with only rudimentary skills.

The Mobile Farm School (MFS) tries to give an answer to this twofold challenge of loss of knowledge and skills due to AIDS, and the resulting hopelessness within the children. It does this by maintaining or even improving the general level of agricultural knowledge and adapting it to the conditions of an affected rural production system, and by empowering vulnerable children with skills and knowledge so they can master their future lives in a better way.

The selection for the participants of the MFS differed from the existing practice (where the VSI members of the cluster would select the participants for any

training). HUMULIZA decided in the case of the MFS that candidates would apply and the MFS staff would make the final selection. The main criteria were:

- Access to a plot (even if it was a small one) – either through their own family, the VSI or the community – on which they could practice agriculture. Inclusion of the caretakers is important in order to get their support for the learning process;
- Some prior experience in agriculture and animal raising showing their interest in this;
- Maintaining the gender balance.

It was also desirable, but not compulsory, that the candidates were literate.

The MFS tries also to include good local farmers as trainers. Due to the financial constraints of the children the methods used have to be based on local materials in the different areas such as soil conservation and improvement, pest control, feeding animals etc. The objective is to introduce the children to ecological sustainable farming. Local farmers have often an intimate knowledge concerning local resources.

Suggestions:

- Agriculture and husbandry is much appropriate in a rural context. But even in a semi-urban environment there are often possibilities for gardening or keeping chicken or rabbits.

- Agriculture and husbandry depend largely on local conditions (soil, climate, culture). Nevertheless there are basic principles such as sustainability, low cost agriculture, local adaptation etc. which are very challenging and needs inputs in terms of knowledge and training from outside.

Resources

1. "Mobile Farm School" (Madoerin K) is a comprehensive study of the practices of the mobile farm schools in the MAHCOP program in Masaka (Uganda) and in HUMULIZA in Tanzania.
2. List of topics of the Mobile Farm School in Nshamba/Tanzania.
3. Example of a Weekly Workplan Unit I in the MFS in Nshamba/Tanzania. The handouts are in Kiswahili.
4. The "Report of the Regional Workshop on HIV and AIDS and Children's Property Rights and Livelihoods in Southern and East Africa" (FAO) contains the voices of many children and youth concerning protection of property rights.



TOPIC 9: Rafiki Mdogo – A Little Friend Older Children Working With Younger Children



Beata Alex
(girl, 18)



Beata: I meet two groups of children every week in the afternoon here in Nshamba. In each group there are about 50 young children between 9 and 12 years. Sometimes we even meet twice per week but not very often. If one of the children is sick, they might also look for me during the week so I can direct them to go to the dispensary.

Generally I find it easy to work with children and I like it very much. If some children are excited and a little bit unruly then I do special games with them. For example, everybody has to bring a stone and then stand in a circle. Then they have to pass their stone to another

child. Or I separate them into girls and boys and we play with a ball. Normally we play and sing a lot. I also teach them good manners. I think the children like to come to the meetings and they accept me as their guardian.

I feel very satisfied through this work. I get experience working with children and can transfer this experience to other children. Anyway I like to be together with younger children. Sometimes I dream that one day I could do such a work as my profession, for example to work in a kindergarten.



Husina Athumani
(girl, 10), Std 4, Nshamba



Husina: I was eight years old when my mother heard about Rafiki Mdogo. She contacted a VSI-member, Geoffrey, who was an attendant of Rafiki Mdogo and asked him if I and my brother could join. He agreed.

I enjoyed going to the meetings. I had three friends, Asimwe, Rehema and another Asimwe, who were already in Rafiki Mdogo. We talked together about it. They told me that they get some support such as exercise books, pens, soap and body oil. Further they told me that they sing and they learn about hygiene and good behaviour.

I don't remember the first time when I joined, but I know that I wasn't afraid to go because Asimwe and Rehema went there. It is really true what they told me. Last time we discussed how we can look after ourselves properly and what belongs to hygiene, like bathing even when the weather is cold. And to wash our clothes regularly and to comb our hair. We also learned about the environment and how important it is to have a separate place for the toilet. I have got many friends in Rafiki Mdogo, maybe up to 20. We meet of course during the Rafiki Mdogo meetings but also at school or at home.



Stewart Rutabingwa
(girl, 11), *Nshamba B*

Stewart: I have been a Rafiki Mdogo member for four years. When we meet we exchange ideas and we chat together. We talk about school and how far the teacher is with the lessons. Or about our caretakers and the

work we have to do. Or that I passed the examination. Or somebody tells us about a ceremony in the area, for example a burial. We also sing in our meetings. Songs we learnt from our attendant or songs from the school that we change and adapt so they fit for Rafiki Mdogo. I like it very much when we play, especially role plays or hiding. Then we learn about good manners: how to greet older persons, to talk to your peers or to respect the family. We get some support. For each meeting we attend, we get a point. At the end of the month you can change you points against soap or exercise books and pens or body oil. For one piece of soap you need 4 points, for an exercise book 1 point. Body oil is expensive, it needs 6 points. I'm very happy to get this support, but I wouldn't leave Rafiki Mdogo if the support would be stopped. I like it very much to play together.

When somebody in the family of a member died, then we visit the household or the orphans and we bring them some food. When I'm more grown up and in the VSI, I would like to become peer educator for prevention. I want to help that we avoid to be infected with the HIV virus.



Rereading the interviews

The Rafiki Mdogo program brings together two age groups, the under 13 year-olds (Rafiki Mdogo), and the over 13 year-old teenagers from the VSI who look after the younger children.

In 2000 the VSI members decided to establish the entry age for VSI to 13 years. But later they recognised that the younger orphans suffer from the same problems. Here are some voices of the VSI initiators of the Rafiki Mdogo:

- "I am an orphan myself and therefore feel a sense of empathy for them since they are also orphans. Looking back, I would have felt less vulnerable and isolated had there been a VSI or Rafiki Mdogo member around when I was younger."
- "Although we are orphans, we have mastered the basic survival skills to cope with life. Hopefully, we can teach some of these techniques to the younger children."
- "I hope to help them overcome the loneliness and isolation that surrounds them. When I was younger, I was fortunate to have a supportive network of people who helped me through my darkest moments. I hope I can do the same for these orphans."

The result of these discussions was the introduction of the Rafiki Mdogo program, managed by older VSI members.

Beata reflects this dedication and this sense of responsibility towards the younger children when she says: “I feel very satisfied through this work. I get experience working with children and can transfer this experience to other children. Anyway I like to be together with younger children.” She is also a source of support during the week: “If one is sick, they might look for me also during the week so I can direct them to go to the dispensary.” These words capture the older children’s feelings of self-worth as well as the feeling of being a contributing member to the wellbeing of the younger children.

Beata received training and gets support from the office to be better equipped with skills that will empower her to become a mentor for younger children. But it has also shaped her vision of her own future, “Sometimes I dream that one day I could do such a work as my profession for example to work in a kindergarten.”

Husina and Stewart seem to be happy in the Rafiki Mdogo – both for the opportunities to play and sing, for learning life skills and for much-needed material

support in the form of soap and school supplies, which they also feel they have earned and not just received as handouts.

Being part of Rafiki Mdogo extends their friendship network, as Stewart expresses very clearly. She says: “I have got many friends in the Rafiki Mdogo – maybe up to 20. I’m very happy to get this support, but I wouldn’t leave Rafiki Mdogo if the support would be stopped. I like it very much to play together.”

One of the main potentials of an organisation is that it survives over time and that it nurtures and develops a sense of identity within the children. Eleven year-old Stewart already anticipates her membership and her future role in VSI and is willing to assume responsibilities for her and her fellows: “When I’m more grown up and in the VSI, I would like to become peer educator for prevention. I want to help that we avoid to be infected with the HIV virus.”

Some lessons learned

The impact evaluation of pensions in the KwaWazee program on orphaned children living with their grandmothers, provides evidence around the considerable workload of young children and how this impacts on the time they have available for playing (see www.KwaWazee.ch/E).

Rafiki Mdogo members associate the weekly meetings strongly as times where they play together. Playing is the way they make friends. The material of the formative evaluation of the VSI and RM also provided evidence that the children often link playing games to descriptions of happy feelings or positive psychological states such as being able to entertain themselves.

Rafiki Mdogo members often mention that they value being taught good manners and hygiene. To be in harmony with the social environment and to care for their own bodies creates self-respect and fosters self-care, both important elements of an effective prevention policy. Without explicitly naming “HIV and AIDS-prevention”, these activities contribute to lay a foundation for the protection of these children when they enter the age of sexual activities.

The program of Rafiki Mdogo consists of three core activities: playing, material support and teaching, which differs from the much wider program offered to the VSI members and includes psychosocial counseling for the most stressed and affected children. Nevertheless, it seems that the accumulated impact of these core activities on the psychosocial wellbeing of these younger children is considerable. The impact evaluation reports a marked and statistically highly significant lower level of emotional stress in Rafiki Mdogo vs non-

members where the non-members manifested a high level of stress through depressed mood, open crying and a greater burden of worries. Although the Project group described similar initial feelings and hardships around the loss of their parent(s), their mood was less overtly distressed and many spontaneously described the reduction in pain and stress through the activities offered by Rafiki Mdogo, their extended friendships and the practical support they had received.

It can be concluded that these three interlinked activities – playing, material support and teaching, within an organisational setting – might form an effective minimal package for younger vulnerable children to improve their psychosocial wellbeing.

Suggestions

- The Rafiki Mdogo model is based on two principles: the principle of peers (children working with children) and on the heritage of the African family system where elder brothers and sisters occupy crucial roles. Even those in Rafiki Mdogo who have no elder siblings have now access to a surrogate.
- Being a peer is not a sufficient qualification to work with younger children, especially vulnerable children. Implementing the principle of “no harm” means that the attendants get sufficient training and are accompanied so that they can do their

challenging work. It is helpful to support children in planning and preparation as is the availability of supportive workbooks and facilitation material.

Resources

- 1.** Around the work with the Rafiki Mdogo, three documents have been developed. The Background and History (4 pages) gives the context in which the program has been developed.
- 2.** The Conception (15 pages) contains a consultation with different stakeholders and a draft for the work with the Rafiki Mdogo.
- 3.** The main document is the Training Manual for Attendants (26 pages). It prepares the VSI members to work with their younger fellows during a one-week training program.
- 4.** Additionally there are supportive Handouts for the Participants (totally 13)
- 5–10.** Supporting material is provided in the Rafiki Mdogo Workbook. It contains games and exercises around basic concepts of psychosocial wellbeing. The format for each unit follows the following structure:
 - Information for you as attendant
 - How to introduce the topic to the Rafiki Mdogo

- Activities, exercises and games.
The following topics are ready (and also available as drafts in Kiswahili)
- Introduction (5)
- Self-esteem and self-confidence (6)
- My body (7)
- My feelings (8)
- How do others see me and how would I like to be perceived by others (9)
- Friendship (10)

Further units of the series are in a draft stage and might be continued (for further information contact Kurt Madoerin at kurt@repssi.org).

II. In Kathorus, an urban settlement outside Johannesburg, the Ekupholeni Mental Health Centre had a similar program, where youth cared and nurtured young children: the Big Leopards. Prof. Donald Davis and Glynis Clatcherty conducted a 2003 evaluation of the Big Leopard Program (and another program of the Zimiseleni Ghetto Boys Youth Program): “Open Society Foundation – Ekupholeni Mental Health Centre Evaluation: Leopards and Zimiseleni/Ghetto Boys Youth Programmes.”

TOPIC 10: Self Defence



Teresia Godwin (23)
former VSI member



they talk, we can support them, for example to go to the police or to the court. The girls learn that they have a right to defend themselves. They talk about their fears and some of them share their deepest secrets in their heart.

Before we start the course and at the end of the training, we have a meeting with the caretakers. Often we learn that the girls started to reveal their bad experiences and secrets to the caretakers.

I think that there are at least three reasons why each girl should join a course of self defence: There is not only rape, but girls are confronted by so many things they don't want. Here they can learn to say 'NO'. Then I see that the exchange of experiences is very powerful. They see that they are not an isolated case. And finally they increase their self confidence.

Teresia: Formerly our training lasted two weeks but we have extended it now to three weeks. I can see a lot of changes during and after the training. During the training you can see how the self-confidence of the girls is growing. Their voice becomes different and they start to talk about their life.

Many of them experienced sexual harassment or even rape but mostly they are afraid to talk about it to other people. In our training group there are other girls with the same or similar experiences. Therefore they see that they are not alone and it is much easier for them to share their bad experiences with others. As soon as



Jalia Athman
(girl, 19), finished Form 4, Nshamba



Jalia: I joined the self-defence training in 2005. The training changed a number of things in my life. The course helped me to become more aware of my environment and how to avoid bad and dangerous situations. But you can't avoid everything. So I learned also what to do if I get in such a bad and dangerous situation. One thing is that I learnt fighting techniques how to defend myself like if somebody comes from behind. So I got physically strong. I also changed my mind. I'm now able to confront everybody, I can express what I want to say. My self-confidence has really grown.

It depends how a boy is approaching to me if I respond or not. If they approach in a violent manner, I reject them. Then they get angry and say: "Ah, she is not beautiful, she is not attractive. She is not responding to us, it seems that she is already tested and maybe she is HIV positive."

The reaction of the other girls who are not in the VSI is very mixed. They know that I was in the course because sometimes I went with the self-defence book to school. They say: "You can't fight a man, they are too strong, see Yaku, he is too strong. They are cheating you when they tell you that you can win against a man." But other girls wanted to join the course but unfortunately there is no chance for them.



Fraiton Felix

(boy, 14), schooling in Rwantege Std 5, Nshamba

Fraiton: I have heard about the self-defence courses, because my sister, who is now 18 years old, has attended. I know that they have a book and an exercise book where they write different things. Then they do exercises how to fight if somebody will attack them. They learn how to protect themselves against HIV and AIDS.

I can see, not only from my sister, but from the other female VSI members that they appreciate the training very much. The training has also changed my sister. Before the training, she was always roaming around, mostly with boys, and she returned only when it was dark. Now she is back much earlier, at the latest at 6 pm. Also she used to have bad friends, some of them close to prostitution. Once she spent the whole night outwards. She told us that she went to visit the aunt



and sent the night there, but later we learned that she cheated. Now she has completely stopped with these bad habits.

I think we boys should also have such courses. It can happen that you play sex with a girl and you don't realise that you are in danger. Many here in the village don't know about the consequences of having sex – and then our parents are dying. I would certainly join such a course.



Rereading the interviews

HIV and AIDS becomes more and more a "young" and "female" disease. "Young" because more than half of the newly infected are young people between 15 and 24 years, and "female" because of all 8 600 000 young people living with HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa (67%) are young women as opposed to 33% who are young men (Rob Chapman & Fatuma Chenge: Finding our Voices, UNICEF 2003).

The VSI self-defence course takes seriously the fact that prevention goes beyond the doctrine of ABC – Abstinence, Being faithful, Condom(ise) – but takes into account the specific gender experiences of girls and young women. Girls are generally socialised to submission and acceptance. Teresia, a former VSI

member and now one of the self-defence trainers, emphasises the social condition in which girls live, “Girls are confronted to so many things they don’t want”. So self-defence is more than teaching defensive combat techniques, but strives to make girls aware that they have the right to say “No”. Jalia, a participant of the course says: “I changed also my mind. I’m now able to confront everybody – I can express what I want to say. My self-confidence has really grown.” Tereza confirms that this is one of the goals, “Finally they increase their self confidence.”

Self-confident girls and young women are not necessary welcomed in the society where girls and women are still expected to be submissive. Jalia reports how the boys provoke her when she doesn’t enter into the game played by them and she rejects them, “Then they get angry and say ‘Ah, she is not beautiful, she is not attractive. She is not responding to us – it seems that she is already tested and maybe she is HIV positive.’”

So the boys clearly play the gender card, “you are not beautiful, attractive = you are not a proper demure and submissive girl.”

Even among the girls who are not VSI members the attitude toward self-defence is ambiguous. Some consider that the actual gender order can’t be changed

or it is too dangerous to challenge it: They say “You can’t fight a man, they are too strong, see Yaku – he is too strong. They are cheating you when they tell you that you can win against a man.”

These girls are not aware that it is not the question of “beating” or “overpowering” a man in combat, but of developing an attitude of self-determination.

Others are attracted to the course and would like to join. Fraiton, a male whose sister has participated in self-defence, sees the impact on her. He stresses the self-protecting and awareness-raising dimension of the training and tells us that boys should be offered this possibility: “It can happen that you play sex with a girl and you don’t realise that you are in danger.” Fraiton is well aware that the training is not just about combat, but is rather concerned with life skills and HIV prevention.

What makes the self-defence training so strong is that the group itself constitutes a safe and “paratherapeutic” place to deposit painful and shameful experiences. Teresia also picks up on this psychosocial aspect of the course and tells us that “Many of them experienced sexual harassment or even rape, but mostly they are afraid to talk about it to other people. In our training group there are other girls with the same or similar

experiences. Therefore they see that they are not alone – and it is much easier for them to share their bad experiences with others.”

Some lessons learned

Self-defence deals with gender equality as an active and empowering tool to better balance the considerable power differences between girls and boys in a rural African society – although the girls agreed, in separate activities during the formative evaluation, that gender equality is practised in VSI. By this they mean that both boys and girls are listened to and that both groups can become leaders. In the same formative evaluation it was acknowledged by girls that this right to equality is not always given free; that sometimes they have to fight for their rights. In this context self-defence plays an important role for girls. Girls perceive that VSI offers them, at the most basic level empowerment opportunities around their individual protection and safety.

But this is not all that is on offer. As an organisation, courses in self-defence for the girls are intended to make a clear stand in the public discussion on gender violence or to initiate this discussion. Within the self-defence course, girls are not – as it often happens – blamed for provoking boys and not behaving well, and therefore guilty if something happens to them.

To introduce self-defence makes it clear where the violence and threats originate and who the probable perpetrators are. Organised self-defence stimulates a public discussion which is, according to diverse interests, controversially discussed, not only in VSI itself, but more importantly in families, the school and the community in general. These controversial positions are very clearly stated in the evaluation report of the first two self-defence courses (see resources). The self-defence courses are addressing the social realities of sexual violence and are forcing girls and boys, and women and men, to take a position around gender-based violence and abuse. In this way, VSI or any child or youth organisation is able to exert a considerable influence on the gender discussion in the community beyond its organisational boundaries.

Self-defence courses for girls are important as protective measure in an environment where male sexual violence against girls is normative. The courses contribute to the (realistic) perception that males and their sexuality are potentially dangerous and harmful for the girls, and that sexuality dominates the relationship between them. This view corresponds to the view of the male and female respondents from seven African countries in the Pattman and Chege study (2003a – see resources) that sexuality, and the act of sex, was set up as the only reasons young adults



across the gender divide would be together. The reasons for being seen together were in the context of sexualised “boyfriend and girlfriend” relationships, with cross-gender non-sexualised friendships being made difficult or impossible because of this view.

How strong the influence of sexualised gender identities is, even in the VSI, became evident in the formative evaluation. Concerning the self-set rules in the VSI clusters, some clusters seem to involve in their rules restrictions to girls on friendships with boys. The report says: “It is unclear from this data if this disempowers girls, but there is some suggestion here that in some clusters the rules applied to girls are restrictive and undemocratic.”

VSI offers many possibilities and promotes many activities for cross-gender activities and friendship. Within VSI girls and boys are allowed to explore and practise new forms of cooperation and friendship. Self-defence gives girls power for self protection and security so they can enter into a non-sexualised relationship with boys. For the boys the courses transmit the message that there limits and boundaries which are defined by the girls.

Some suggestions to address unequal gender power dynamic in child- and youth-led organisations are:

- Offering a range of cross-gender activities creates an experimental space where new roles and gender identities can be explored.
- Self-defence for girls is itself a strong statement inside and outside the organisation.
- Equal representation of girls in all trainings is imperative. Equal representation in membership is desirable. Equal representation in leadership should be strived for, but not implanted from outside, unless the members decide to introduce gender quotas.
- A gender audit is helpful to make visible the blind gender spots in an organisation.

Resources

1. Up till 2005, 252 girls had been trained in self-defence. In 2004 the VSI did an internal evaluation on the impact of a training in which 26 girls participated: "Self defence – internal evaluation" (Mpunge L, Nshamba, 2004)

2, 3. Rob Chapman and Fatuma Chenge have written one of the most important and interesting books concerning sexuality, prevention and youth: "Finding our Voices – Gendered and Sexual Identities and HIV/AIDS in Education" (UNICEF 2003). Data was collected in seven African countries (Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and the study deals with girls' and boys' views on sexuality and being a girl or a boy. Self-defence training partly addresses the sexual identities of girls and boys.



Topic II: MADaboutART

The Role of Adults in Child and Youth Led Organisations

This chapter takes the form of an interview with Larry Gurney and Liz Brown, both of whom are trustees of MADaboutART, an organisation which has strong elements of a child- and youth-led organisation.

The M.A.D in MADaboutART stands for Make A Difference. MADaboutART began in 2001 as a UK-based art-based charity. Its founder, Larry Gurney, has a background in science and has been living openly with HIV since 1993. At the outset the mission statement of MAD was to address HIV using art to link children across the planet.

In 2006 registration of the MADaboutART Trust as an independent non-profit organisation in South Africa was completed. By this time, MAD mission had evolved to include a more explicit prevention focus, that is, to reduce the number of new HIV infections in children and young people, especially those who are orphaned or otherwise vulnerable due to AIDS. By this time MAD had also concentrated much of its focus in Nekkies township and the Southern Cape.



Nekkies lies between Knysna and Plettenberg Bay, South African coastal towns along the famous Garden Route and where a high percentage of high end holiday homes remain unoccupied for most of the year. Glaringly stark contrasts in standards of living exist between the townships settlements and the suburbs on the ocean side of the N2 motorway. In Nekkies and its neighbouring townships, unemployment is between 30% and 50% and 2006 statistics show that 32% of local people received only primary education. One in four individuals have impaired growth due to malnutrition. Ante-natal HIV testing indicates HIV

prevalence locally is 21% (+/-4%) and rising, although data from community health services suggest that in reality prevalence is above 30% in many township communities in the area. Add to this, high levels of teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol abuse.

MADaboutART's organisational vision is to invest in local communities, providing opportunities for employment and personal development whilst ensuring quality delivery of its programme. People living with HIV play a vital role in development and implementation of MADaboutART's programmes and HIV-positive people are actively encouraged to join the team.

MADaboutART began its early pilot work in partnership with local art classes at Masizame Center where a group of young people attended classes with local artist Lynn Beaton and volunteers. In the beginning there were only a handful of kids who just loved to come to the MADaboutART center and mess with paint, what Larry calls "expressional art", taking pains to draw a distinction with its close cousin, art

therapy. The signature intervention of MADaboutART, then and even today, is the “Art Attack”. Here children choose a theme or issue close to their hearts, have a quick focus group discussion, line up a piece of paper each or perhaps work in single group panel, and attack the paper with brushes, paint, crayons, etc, in a word colour and emotion. Post attack, there is a debriefing, talking and sharing.

By 2008, MAD, while retaining its core art-based methodologies, had begun to expand and to spread its wings. MADaboutART now has:

- A chief executive (Larry Gurney) who in a voluntary position leads operations in Southern Africa and who also coordinates global educational initiatives;
- A director (Elizabeth Brown), who also in a voluntary position is responsible for fundraising and organisational development;
- Seven Youth Ambassadors drawn from the ranks of the MAD kids, two of whom hold the title of senior youth ambassadors. All youth ambassadors perform the role of youth leaders and peer educators and receive salaries plus significant training bursaries.
- 10 volunteer Young Youth Ambassadors who have demonstrated commitment to MAD as well as promising leadership or active citizen skills. In return for assuming positions of responsibility within MAD,

they receive a stipend paid to their households for food, clothing, school fees and school equipment.

Rather than just the handful of kids who six years ago had become used to dropping into the centre, 120 kids a week have now been mobilised into four MADclubs of 30 kids per club. These children spend every afternoon and most weekends at the MAD centre.

In terms of MAD’s expansion, the Youth Ambassadors (facilitators) and the Young Youth Ambassadors work with a further 150 children at local primary schools during school time within life orientation lessons. There are also plans to develop MADclubs in neighbouring townships. A further 800 children participated in an ever-growing art exhibition workshop programme – a product of orchestrated art attacks in which the children express themselves and support each other around pertinent psychosocial issues facing their communities.

In May 2008, I brought Kurt Madoerin to meet Larry Gurney and Liz Brown and recorded their conversation.

Jonathan: Larry and Liz meet Kurt, Kurt meet Larry and Liz. Larry, last time we met I was struck when you told me that you now go into the MAD centre less and less, and are able to do more of your own stuff and background stuff from home, and that you only go in if and when the kids call you saying they need your

help. This reminded me strongly of Kurt’s work with VSI where he is working explicitly with the concept of “child- and youth-led organisations”. I am so happy to bring you three together as I believe there is so much all of you and the rest of us can learn from each other.

Kurt: Yes, from our visit yesterday to the MAD centre, I can see there is so much we can learn and so much to discuss however I am particularly interested in this issue of the adult role within child- and youth-led organisations.

Larry: This is a really interesting question for me too, one I have had many questions around for many years.

Kurt: What kind of questions?

Larry: Well apart from my own role which I’ll get to later, many many adults approach MAD “volunteering” their time and this is quite a challenge. Many of them mean well and many of them bring tons of value to the kids, but not always and it seems to me that it’s more about them than the kids. We now have a kind of policy or criterion for adult volunteers and look for an awareness and acknowledgment from them, that the kids have tons to offer them, and the interaction has to be a kind of exchange in which the kids voluntarily decide if they want the services this person is offering.

Some people just want to volunteer without knowing what that means. These are more often than not well meaning people who do just want to contribute and that is great, but it is not often what we want the children want or need.

Liz: In a way it was a child-led organisation, amongst other things, that we set out to achieve in the very beginning of MAD. We recognised children as experts in matters relating to children more than us adults. But while we had this idea we had no real map how to get there and this is where Larry and I compliment each other quite well. Larry has always been the visionary and I try to plan the route and together we get there somehow.

Kurt: If I hear you correctly, both of you are saying that two key functions of adults within child- and youth-led organisations is to maintain the vision, and to create a holding structure and framework for children and youth to run their own organisations. These skills are not really natural to children and have taken adults us years and years to learn never mind “master”.

Liz: Yes, absolutely, I guess I am a kind of overall encourager and mentor, but I also focus on organisational structure, organisational policies, organisational development, fund raising, oversight.



But like Larry I don't come in every day, just 3 days per week. Relating to the extent to which MAD is and is becoming a child- and youth-led organisation, I can say that our target for this in a more complete sense is 2010. That is the date for the handover and one the kids are aware of and working towards. This will not just be a hand over of the keys where we say "bye". We will continue to be there in an advisory capacity.

Larry: I think adults in organisations involving children really need to guard against problem solving for kids. The challenge for me is to allow them space and time to find their own solutions which involves a need for adults to slow down and being able to exist in the quite frustrating space where you observe kids struggling and fumbling to find their own solutions individually and as a group. It's a bit like washing up, no one really likes the method others use but if you are so controlling, then you need to do it (and everything else) yourself, which takes you right away from the idea of a child- and youth-led organisation.

Getting back to my own role and to the role of trustees in a child- and youth-led organisation, I see it very much in terms of a parenting role – caring, being an anchor, responsible etc., but also able to let go. That is allowing the children to become autonomous, move on, move out, form new relationships and alliances etc. For example, we work hard to move the youth

ambassadors into local networks that lie beyond MAD, eg. Beaty is chairperson of MSAT i.e., the multi sectoral action team round HIV, TB and malaria which is an initiative of the Global Fund. Sipiwe is the Secretary of the Arts and Culture forum for Knysna. Before I would have sat on these committees but am beginning to let go which is not always easy.

Kurt: How did you begin to do this, that is, let go?

Larry: It began with me handing over to the youth ambassadors and the young youth ambassadors beginning to show visitors around. As Liz said, this is just one example of letting go, which is a gradual process and we reckon it will take another two years for management and organisational development skills to take hold.

Kurt: Is there any evidence that these skills which are really quite challenging even for most adults, are beginning to take root?

Larry: Sticking with the parenting analogy, fundraising can be likened to how the survival of family depends usually on one or two breadwinners, and this job of income generation will probably always remain a function of adults. Having said this, we have begun to impart these skills. We work together with

youth ambassadors to develop key aspects of all funding proposals. How it works is like this – Liz and I have written a template with spaces for project title, expected outcomes, budget, etc. The Youth Ambassadors fill these in, submit them to us and also make a verbal presentation of the proposal to the trustees and to the other kids. Last year we worked on a Global Fund proposal in this way and the Youth Ambassadors even presented this themselves to Global Fund funding panel.

Kurt: Was it successful?

Larry: Yes but that has a lot to do with how the Global Fund has devolved power and increased participation possibilities for the implementing partners of grant recipients. There are other organisations who still believe that children should be seen and not heard, that we should work for them and not with them, etc.

Liz: Around the questions of adults handing over responsibility, participation and sustainability, another aspect of the succession plan is the tourist-related income generation schemes in conjunction with MTO forestry and Knysna Tourism. Right now the kids are engaged in developing township tours which have the potential not only to generate funds for the project but also for the wider community.

Jonathan: I can see that the Youth Ambassadors and Young Youth Ambassadors have extraordinarily high levels of participation in the organisation, what about the other kids? Is there a danger that power could become concentrated into the hands of a few which then becomes a barrier to broader based participation?

Larry: I think the example of the Youth Councils best illustrates this. I mentioned before that MAD clubs comprise 20–25 kids who organise themselves mostly on the basis of locale and age. At its conception, each club democratically creates its own ground rules over one week as well as the repercussions for breaking rules. An overarching structure is then the Youth Council. Each MAD club selects 2 individuals and the MAD facilitator to sit on an internal club committee to ensure that rules are maintained within that club. If the two elected members of the MAD club and the facilitator cannot resolve a problem, they bring it to Youth Council, that is all the Youth Ambassadors plus one representative from each MAD club. For me this is a good example of participation and democracy at work within MAD. The power really lies with the rank and file members who elect their own leaders and who can, and have voted out, not only Youth Council members, but even Young Youth Ambassadors who they feel have been abusing their power. There has of course still has to be clear disciplinary and grievance for



paid workers and we abide by the labour laws and a strong code of conduct and ethical policy.

Kurt: To build up the power of children and to try facilitate the inclusion of even the most shy / voiceless children is really critical, one of our tasks as adults – and its starts even on a micro level. In our children groups there are very young children – 4, 5 years old. As a tool to encourage children to speak we use to ask each child to say in one or two sentences how the last week was. These very young children are mostly very shy – and so we “invented” the phone. The young child

whispers to an older child in its ear what happened last week. Then the older child reports: “Aisha (who is Aisha – so she has quickly to stand up) has got a cloth past week”. After six months, each child is usually able to report itself.

Jonathan: What about the challenge around how to make limited space and resources available for new children to be part of MAD?

Larry: On this score, we have a kind of principle in place where each child is allowed to be a solid member of MAD for one year, but in the second year we ask them to be more outward and community focused, running various projects, for example the food security / gardening project, the wellness – football project, etc. This makes space for new kids to come in and use the computers, art materials etc. Jonathan: I can see that for many children whose parents are absent or dead, you and Liz and the older Youth Ambassadors might literally become parents for these children. I imagine the idea is that an organisation like MAD would not want to supplant parenting and community support structures but rather to augment or support these. Is this a difficult line to maintain?

Larry: It is, for instance, even though each child enrolling in a MAD club must gain a parent’s written

consent, we have had instances where parents march in to the centre and grab a child by the scruff of the neck and begin to beat the child. The MAD center is a safe space where we don't allow violence or abuse of any kind. In these instances we literally have to step in and "rescue" the child and explain to the parent what we are about. But to guard against working against parents, showing them up in a bad light, or polarising children and caregivers in households, we also work directly with caregivers. For example, as mentioned previously, a portion of the stipends paid to Young Youth Ambassadors is paid directly to the caregiver and not to the child. In cases where the family loses income temporarily perhaps due to illness or job loss, then we work with the Young Youth Ambassadors to identify needs and support the whole family through the money they have in the MADbank, which is a savings scheme the children control. Sometimes that means sacrificing a dream they have been saving for, but that is their choice.

Kurt: There are so many topics we could discuss, the topics we used for each chapter in this book and also for the interviews with the VSI and RM children. We could talk about these for instance how VSI does prevention and how MADaboutART does prevention. My experience however has been that the single thing that makes the most difference for the wellbeing of the

children is that they are part of their own organisation. If prevention work within that is successful, it is largely due to the fact that it is prevention work within a child- and youth-led organisation, and not the prevention approach per se. I am trying to stress here the huge importance of organisation and participation over and above particular methodologies or activities.

Larry: I can really relate to that. In the beginning HIV was a central point – over the years I have come to realise that vulnerability comes from a feeling of limited agency and in real terms limited choices or goals that are visible on the horizon of possibilities. HIV is round the corner for all these kids, the actual info you need to prevent HIV can be presented in a 15 minute session, that is what to do and not to do. Prevention is much more about making the right choices, self-esteem, empowerment, none of which is 100% about HIV, so in some sense HIV is now simmering gently on the back burner, and building strong young people through a child- and youth-led organisation is boiling away on the front burner. HIV has also allowed us to deal with 100 000 other issues towards broader social change. Participation within MAD offers the kids so many opportunities to develop "Life Skills", admittedly an overused term, but I see MAD as a place to have fun and to play. Play is a terribly important form of development. Here kids come to play, to role play

– for example how to react to inappropriate touch, to practice, to rehearse for life and as part of life.

Kurt: So is M.A.D making a difference?

Liz: We had a professional independent evaluation in May 2006 which showed that MADaboutART's HIV education and empowerment model is making a difference in terms of providing a supportive, safe and caring environment for children and young people. Children and young people attending after-school 'MAD clubs' are also less likely to engage in negative cycles of behaviour – missing school, alcohol and drug abuse, crime. MAD kids are also more likely to avoid sexual risk-taking, that is to delay their first sexual experience, have fewer partners, and use condoms.

Kurt: Certainly that is a huge difference but I don't doubt it. It goes somehow along with the experience of VSI – and the secret for these impacts lies in the participation of the children themselves. I like the slogan that "children are not a problem, but part of the solution".

Larry and Liz, thanks a lot for taking your time and allowing me to learn from your experiences and bring lots of lessons back to Tanzania.

TOPIC 12: Children who Live on the Street: The Ultimate Child- and Youth-Led Organisations?

Child Restoration Outreach (CRO) is a leading Christian non-governmental organisation in Uganda working with Children who live on the street, their families and communities from which the children who live on the street originate. CRO began its work in 1992 in Mbale, Eastern Uganda. It then extended its outreach in 1998 to Jinja (Eastern/central Uganda), in 2002 to Masaka (Southern Uganda), and finally in 2007 to Lira (Northern Uganda). CRO has reached over 2 000 children who live on the street, since its inception.

Caleb Wakhungu has worked with CRO Masaka since 2003. He is in daily contact with these children who live on the street, and was a key supporter when they started to build their own organisation – the Baaba-clubs. The interview focuses on this experience of organising children who live on the street.

Kurt: Caleb, I know that you are working with children who live on the street in Masaka town. Can you tell me how you became involved in this work?

Caleb: Actually I do counselling for children who live

on the street and their caretakers. Also I sensitise the community where the children come from, and I conduct trainings for caretakers in what we call “positive parenting”. When I got trained in psychosocial support and we analysed the situation in our town, we discovered that children who live on the street have been left out of the program for vulnerable children.

I personally have a short period in my life where I experienced what living in the street means. In 1996 I ran away from home at the age of 16. I had finished my senior Grade Four at school and my parents were poor and could not afford to pay my tuition. I felt my future was bleak and I decided to leave the home and went to Nairobi but the life there was very tough. I was robbed, beaten and went without food for some days until I landed on some Samaritan who transported me back home. This few weeks were a turning moment for my life and when I returned home, I made bricks, sold them and paid the fees for the advanced level and for the college. I chose the course in Social Work which would enable me to help children at risk.

Kurt: So your personal experience in Nairobi was the

deep reason to study Social Work and to apply for work that involved children who live on the street?

Caleb: Exactly. In 2003 after my college, CRO advertised for the post of a social worker which I applied for and I was given the job. My traumatic experiences in Nairobi gave me enough evidence to understand that children who live on the street are children at very high risk

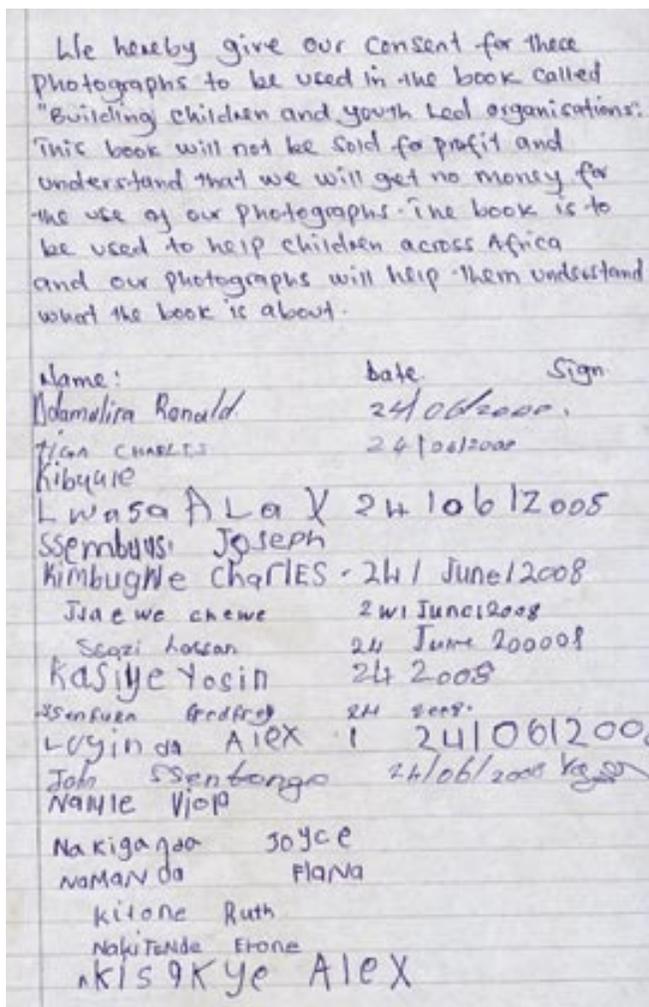
Kurt: Masaka is not a very big town, how is it that there are a good number of children who live on the street?

Caleb: Masaka had been affected by the war in 1979 when the forces from Tanzania entered the country to liberate the Ugandans from the brutal regime of Idi Amin. Many people died in the war and the major buildings were demolished. It is only now that the town is growing. With the growth of the town, the slums are also growing. Additionally Masaka is the most affected area by HIV and AIDS in the country. Many young people have died of AIDS and have left their children in the care and support of old people who themselves

need support. This reason and poverty forced many children to the street to earn their livelihood. A number of the children also lost their property to relatives. Some leave their home to the street due to mistreatment and neglect at home, the influence of other peers, child trafficking, unemployment, and last but not least due to the attraction of the town compared to the village. Our survey done in February 2008 indicated that there were about 450 children who live on the street in Masaka. But not all of them are living completely on the street. About 100 of them are on the street during day, but they return at night to their families.

Kurt: I have myself experience with children who live on the street in Brazil, Vietnam and in Mozambique. Everywhere I could see that these children are excellent survivors but living under extremely difficult conditions. Did you observe the same here?

Caleb: Oh yes, I agree with you Kurt, these children are really survivors. They work very hard, sometimes 15 hours a day or even more. I see them carrying luggage or goods which might weigh 50 kg or more. But I see also how they take care of their younger siblings. At times they are beaten badly by the community members when they are caught in petty crimes but you will find them working even in that pain



because they know very well that no one is supporting for them. All these indicate that children who live on the street are good survivors.

Kurt: How old are the children?

Caleb: They are in the range of 8 to 18 years. But coming back on their strength as survivors, they are also strong planners and excellent organisers. They know when and where there is a chance to earn some money or to get some food. And they are so brave, they walk alone at night and sleep in unfinished houses without covering themselves even when it rains but will be out the next day working.

Kurt: I think that they have to plan so carefully because there are few opportunities. If they miss one of them they will miss to eat. When I listen to you then their life seems to be very stressful.

Caleb: It is definitely. And in order to survive they have to develop special skills. Besides being good organisers they are excellent observers and communicators. They "read" their clients and design strategies to win their favor in order to achieve what they want e.g. when they go to the market to get some work to do.

Kurt: Mostly children who live on the streets form groups in order to survive. Often the people call them

“gangs”. Do children who live on the street in Masaka also organise themselves into groups?

Caleb: They form groups who sit frequently together. I can see a big solidarity among them. They try to protect each other in this quite hostile environment. This solidarity – and also a feeling for justice – can lead them to disparate actions. Last year in November, I went to train the new staff for CRO in Lira. I found that Lira district authorities had imprisoned 20 children who live on the street but we intervened and they released them. The reason behind was that a child who lived on the street was cheated by a shop keeper when the child bought chapatti. When the boy discovered it he returned to claim for his money. The shop keeper refused to give back his money and the child wanted to take all the chapattis away! In that struggle, the shop keeper took the stick and banged the boy on the head and the child died. When the news spread around the town and reached other children who live on the street, they mobilised themselves went to the place and burnt the shop down. The shop keeper was lucky that he was not in.

Children who live on the street form something like a foster-family. They sleep together; they work together; they protect each other; they take the sick children to the clinic for treatment. If there is somewhere

an opportunity for work or getting support, they communicate among the group members.

Kurt: I think that we can learn a lot from children who live on the street about children’s ability and capacity to form an entirely child-led group – due to their loss of the support by the adults. Are there also girls among these children?

Caleb: There are few, but there are. In our survey we conducted in February, there were about 30 girls living on the street.

Kurt: Children who live on the street are often very mistrustful due to the many bad experiences they have had with adults. Caleb, can you tell us how you and your organisation managed to get the confidence of these children?

Caleb: It is true, Kurt, that these children have gone through a series of traumatic events being inflicted to them by adults in various forms like property grabbing after the loss of their parents, denial of basic needs, sexual abuse, stigma and discrimination. When they live on the street, it takes a lot of time for them to trust us. We get in contact with them through street walks of our outreach programs. For example, we go out on the street to sensitise them and the community on HIV

and AIDS and concerning the rights of children - which are also the rights of street children. And we offer them possibilities for playing, for music, dance and drama which were very good ways to familiarise with them.

Later we involved them in a survey investigating their ideas what CRO could do for them. One of their ideas was to form their own organisation. We picked up this idea and discussed how such an organisation would look like. We came several times together and the planning process started. The final product of these discussions was the creation of the “Baaba-Club”. The “Baaba” is a Luganda word which means “the elderly sibling who guides the younger ones”. The children who live on the street felt that they were not just the passive recipients of services but could also contribute to social change in the communities that had branded them with negative names.

Kurt: So it seems to me the idea of the responsibility of elder children towards younger was quite in the centre of the discussion – something they probably learnt also as children who live on the street where the children in absence of the parents had the full responsibility for the care of their younger siblings

Caleb: This is true, but also you find usually this pattern in the African family, where elder children care the younger

ones. So the children started to organise themselves and to elect leaders for their group. CRO trained children as trainers in reproductive health, in prevention of HIV and AIDS, life skills, childrens' rights and responsibilities and basic skills in counselling. Every month, the club members meet at CRO to introduce new members, plan for outreach activities, do practices on how to carry key messages to the community on identified topics, and also to share the challenges and successes of the previous outreaches and way forward. During this time, the CRO staff is present to guide them but we do not over influence or control their decisions. Members of the Baaba Club can invite friends and propose that they can become members. He or she is introduced – and then the members decide about acceptance. The Clubs have their own rules for accepting new members and initiating them into the club. The key conditions for entry into the club is that one is ready to change from acts like stealing, abusing, fighting and is ready to develop a goal in life and can support each other to peruse the goals in life.

Kurt: Are the clubs mixed i.e. children who live on the street and other children?

Caleb: No, in the Baaba are only children who live on the street. But through the implementation of their activities e.g the outreach programs on community sensitisation of prevention of HIV, or children's rights

they come in contact with other children in the community. There are also clubs in the community, e.g. football clubs, where the children who live on the streets become more and more integrated with other children.

Kurt: What was most difficult when you started the Baaba clubs?

Caleb: There were two main difficulties. One difficulty had to do with the internal culture of the children who live on the street group. On one side they have their "commandos" to whom they had to obey. At the same time they have no formal meetings, they used just to talk all of them at the same time and not necessarily to listen to each other. This is now changing. They have now a more formal structure with elected leaders and formal procedures in the discussion e.g. When one is talking, others have to listen, issues are voted and the majority prevails. So the minority had the feelings that their issues are not respected and could stay out of the clubs for some time but slowly they had to understand the culture of the club and are now progressing well. They have to accept and implement the rules they have decided themselves. So we observe that the "commandos" who are not necessarily the club leaders have to change their habit, at least in the clubs.

Kurt: Two things are very interesting for me, firstly,

are these leaders or the commandos in the "no adult facilitated groups" or "gangs", the same ones who emerge as leaders in the Baaba Club?

Caleb: Concerning the question on the commandos taking leadership in the club! It is a yes they do. The influence they have on other children puts them in the position of becoming their leaders and on the side of the organisation. It is good for us because once the commandos are changed, the rest of other children follow but not only by dictatorship

Kurt: That is very interesting. It seems that there is a double culture of leadership at the same time. One culture is more democratic – in the Baaba Club, and one culture is more hierarchic and authoritarian – in the children who live on the street group. It seems that the children are able to switch between the two styles according the environment. In Baaba, the children can learn to listen better to each other, and each child has a voice, and this can help them to integrate with people in Masaka.

Caleb: Yes, it is kind of preparatory ground for the children who live on the street to learn to re-integrate into "civilian life". The children who live on the street have a bad reputation which is used by the community as a pretext to exploit them, to cheat and abuse them and even to exploit them sexually. If the children

change their behavior, the community has also to change – even if these changes are very slow. So the children who live on the street become agents of change in the community through their new, different behaviour, using their communication skills e.g. to teach other children on HIV and AIDS and the children's rights. They interact with other children through football and other games. So the community slowly changes their negative attitudes towards children who live on the street through the Baaba clubs. From being considered as thieves and generally social deviants to agents of social change – that is very positive.

Kurt: This is exactly the same process we observed with orphans in Tanzania whereby the child-led organisation is the main vehicle not only for the change within the children, but also for the change in the community.

Caleb: When we talk about changes, there was another challenge. Changes happen always gradually but it was difficult for the club members to understand that life is not either black or white. They wanted tough punishments for those who had missed to follow the club norms like terminating their membership. There we adults had to intervene and to train the leaders in basic counseling skills and this helped to solve the conflicts. When I look back to the five years experience I respect and admire the children as

champions of change – within themselves and within their environment of other children and adults.

Kurt: One more question, what is the main difference between how the children existed when they were self-mobilised into their own “gangs” or groups, and under the Babaa Club where there is adult guidance, albeit background guidance and fear, etc. Of course it would be better to ask them this question but what do you think?

Caleb: The differences that we can quickly see between the children mobilising themselves and now under the Baaba club are, they now looks more organised and formal and are more recognised by the community than when they are informal in their gangs. They are also now more organised and have structure to refer to in case of any issue that they want help. The gangs were basically formed for protection and survival purposes and had nothing or little to do with creating the social change in the community. Now we see that the leaders in the Baaba club know that they are accountable to the rest of the members and they try as much as possible to move away from the expectation which is in the gangs that leaders can do anything they like. As far as I can see the gangs have no clear purpose and goal which the Baaba has, that is the Baaba is a preparatory ground for the re-integration of the children who live on the street into the community but the gangs are more of

looking for ways to survive on the street.

Kurt: The really interesting thing about children who live on the street “gangs” or how children on the street organise themselves is that they do this without any adult facilitation or interference. You have the experience of then offering these groupings something extra. In their eyes what extra value do you think is added by this adult initiated intervention into what they are already doing? And how does this principally differ from what they were doing before this was offered or taken up? For example, maybe before there is more cruelty, or justice is rougher, or leadership is just a matter of power and strength and fear, etc. Of course it would be better to ask them this question but what do you think?

Caleb: Thank you for this question! I think part of the answer is taken care off in the previous answer! We acknowledge that children have the potential to lead, organise, plan and make meaning of their situations. But by the nature of their age and the generational gap, they need the adults to guide them to reconcile the gap and also to initiate them into adulthood. By planning with the children and providing the guidance at different levels, the adult will be taking the initiative to groom the children into becoming the better leaders of tomorrow. It was because of this background that the Baaba children who live on the street sought for

support from CRO so that they are help to get on track where they had failed.

One example: Children who live on the street have good ideas of how they love their future to look like. But because of the power issues, the young and shy child may not express him or herself in a situation where no one can listen to him or her. The good ideas then will not come out and so will end with him or her. But in the formal setting like Baaba club, all children are allowed to express themselves free and no one gets annoyed or punishes a friend after the meeting. The gangs are temporary in nature and the Baaba is long lasting and the children feel they belong to it. So they develop strong attachments and affection amongst themselves and draw experiences from one another for better living. This is my view but it would be better to ask them as well to comment.

Kurt: Yes, I am sorry we won't have the opportunity to ask the Baaba Club members what they think and feel as we did for VSO and Rafiki Mdogo. I will be interested to hear their responses to this book. Thanks a lot for this talk and I wish you and the Baaba many good experiences in the construction of a better and more tolerate society.

Caleb: Thank you Kurt for setting some aside for this conversation. Be Blessed.



TOPIC 13: Advocacy by Child- and Youth-Led Organisations: Impacts on Psychosocial Wellbeing

Psychosocial impacts of advocacy by children for children has not been a topic of vital interest, perhaps because the child who attempts advocacy is still generally seen as being dependant on adults to support or facilitate the process. Thus the focus often remains on advocacy issues and/or the adults and organisations who undertake this kind of work. Nevertheless, Sonja Grover from Lakehead University suggests that “advocacy by children promotes their resilience and positive self-conception. The psychological benefits of such advocacy by the child are distinguished from mental health interventions where the child is generally viewed as a passive participant and ‘deficient’ in critical ways” (Sonja Grover, “Advocacy BY Children as a Causal Factor in Promoting Resilience“, *Childhood* 2005, Vol. 12(4): 527–538).

The experiences of Consol Homes documented below show that a child-led organisation is an excellent tool to promote advocacy on their own behalf and on behalf of other children. As showed earlier, children in a child-led organisation develop a positive identity as proactive children and youth. Their activities and

identity formation extend beyond self interest and organisational interests to more universal concerns affecting children and youth in general.

Advocacy needs social power in order to be heard and to become effective. Individuals have little chance to bring through their messages. This is true for adults and even more so for children.

Sonja Grover (op cit.) makes an interesting suggestion on the link between advocacy and social integration: “Indeed, advocacy for oneself or others is itself a measure of social integration since it belies a faith in the social structure. Thus, engaging in advocacy behaviour may be one key moderating factor that helps to buffer the child psychologically to some degree against the impact of their adverse living situation and connects them to the larger community.”

In the years 2003/04 the government of Malawi began to elaborate the National Plan of Action. In this interview, Kurt Madoerin asked Alfred Chapomba, the founder of Consol Homes Orphan Care (CHOC) and

the Orphan Affairs Unit (OAU), about the process of inclusion of children into the preparation.

Kurt: Can you tell me a little bit about the background?

Alfred: Consol Homes Orphan Care (CHOC) is a charitable organisation that works in Malawi with orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC) in two rural areas of Traditional Authority – Makwangwala in Ntchewu, and Kalolo in the Lilongwe districts of Malawi. The organisation works with over 20 000 registered OVC as well as 1 500 grandmothers, widows and persons living with HIV and AIDS under 480 community volunteers. As such, the organisation considers it worthwhile to have a proper channel of soliciting the views and ideals of the children it serves to ensure programming relevance and effectiveness. In this regard, the Orphan Affairs Unit (OAU) concept comes into active play.

The OAU is a child-led organisation within CHOC, with a leadership structure headed by a president and

vice president and vulnerable children from each village electing a representative as their village MP. Operating on the principle that each one has a right to express their views without being judgmental to the other, the children conduct sessions on various issues like sharing problems and finding solutions as peers. Where they fail to come up with effective solutions, or are dealing with large-scale problems, they bring these issues to the attention of CHOC management. CHOC is the mother organisation that can guide and facilitate issues with the powers-that-be.

Through such forums, the OAU have been able to solve many problems facing many children within the reach of CHOC, in addition to carrying out many self-help projects, including the construction of community-based childcare centres, repairing elderly persons' houses, working in the maize fields, and even caring for the sick.

Kurt: Can you say more about advocacy?

Alfred: Malawi has a large number of children affected by HIV and AIDS and a national response to this critical situation was very urgent. With the support of UNICEF, our government begun work in this area. As mentioned before, in 2001, Consol Homes facilitated the formation of a child-led wing of its operations called the Orphan Affairs Unit (OAU). This was



CHOC's first experience with a child-led organisation to give a voice to children to speak out for themselves and to publicly address issues that affect them. The OAU began to make an impact among the children and adults in the area, although at this time there was only one committee in existence. So the UNICEF Malawi office, keen to learn about the opinions and concerns of children, organised a meeting for UNICEF representatives, representatives of the government and a group of about 15–20 child members of the OAU.

Kurt: How did you prepare the children for this important meeting?

Alfred: We didn't prepare them at all – not in the sense that we discussed the issues before. UNICEF and the government wanted to hear the authentic voices of children, not our opinions. However, it was not the first time that the children had to speak in public or address high-level officials. They already had some experience – through their contact with communities, traditional leaders, and even with our own organisation – of standing up for their own issues. The children had also had general training, which covered issues of developing self-confidence, communication, public speaking skills etc., and even the actual running of their own organisation might have served as preparation for a discussion with government representatives.

Kurt: What were the main concerns of the children which they transmitted to the delegation?

Alfred: Education was a very burning issue. The children proposed a bursary system which would benefit those who had lost support at home. They also raised their living conditions. Many of the children live with poor and frail grandparents, and they felt that the government should support grandparents in their task of caring for their orphaned grandchildren. Furthermore, they requested contact between the OAU members and members of the national Parliament so that they could raise their concerns with the policy makers of the nation. Finally they

insisted that their views should be taken seriously and that children should be included in the discussion of solutions to problems that affect them.

Kurt: Do you think that this meeting had some influence on the National Plan of Action?

Alfred: I think so. It certainly reinforced some already-existing ideas regarding the National Plan. But I feel what is even more important is the fact that children have been considered as “knowledgeable” and have been consulted. I find that this is an important step on the path to recognise children as young citizens and part of the solutions to problems that affect them. And this spread even beyond our borders. During a visit of a team from Zambia with REPSSI, which included an official from the Ministry of Education, children and members of NGOs in that country, there was a meeting with the OAU in which their expertise in matters of child and youth policy was acknowledged. The team went back to replicate the concept in their country.

Kurt: What was the reaction of the children?

Alfred: Of course, the children felt very proud and honoured for being given the opportunity to hold discussions of such importance with the government

and UNICEF. They felt important that their views were requested in such a national planning process and that they could talk on behalf of thousands of children countrywide living in a similar situation. It was a big motivation for them – even to work hard at school.

Kurt: Did the meeting have some effect on the final document?

Alfred: I believe so – if you look at the fact that most areas seem to be leaning towards the children’s views. Even more, the OAU was mentioned for the first time in a national document, and the life story of the president of the OAU at that time, Hawa, was used as an example of the situation of orphans and vulnerable children and how they try to cope while influencing change within their communities. So the idea of children in a child-led organisation as partners in policy discussions appeared in the National Plan.

Also, after the visit of the Zambian delegation, the follow-up report from the REPSSI Zambia office was that one of the organisations that visited Malawi, the Christians Children’s Fund (CCF), was able to organise a meeting of the Minister of Health in Zambia and Zambian children. At this meeting the Minister is reported to have actually shed tears in front of cameras after persistent questions from an orphaned

girl on hospital fees for orphaned children. A few weeks later, it is reported that the President declared that there would no more be medical fees charged for orphaned children in hospitals.

Kurt: Was there any follow-up to this meeting?

Alfred: Subsequently we had contact with the World Food Programme (WFP) Malawi Office around the issue of school feeding programmes, as well as meeting with Stephen Lewis, at the time the Special Envoy of the United Nations, and Anne Veneman, the UNICEF Executive Director. The OAU met with Mr Lewis at least twice to discuss various issues which the Envoy relayed back to high-level government officials. But perhaps more importantly, and far more frequently, are the OAU meetings with traditional leaders in the communities which is the “daily bread” of advocacy for the issues of the children.

Kurt: Alfred, I wish the OAU many successes in their struggle to improve the conditions of children. Thanks so much to you, your organisation and especially to the children for your explanations and great work. Let us now hear the voices of the children and let them have the last word.



The Story of Olipa

My name is Olipa, I am aged 17, and have been sick on and off for several years now. I stayed with my mother when she was sick for a long time before she died.

After she died, I started to live with my grandmother. She is very loving and caring for me. She told me that because I am sick many times that I should not go to school because others will be laughing at me and that I should be at home.

One day, Hawa the president of the OAU at Kalolo Centre came with her friends and told me that I should not stop going to school. When my grandmother heard this, she laughed and said I should not go to school because it would be difficult for me and that other children would be laughing at me. But Hawa said that I should not worry because I needed to learn so that I can be able to depend on myself when I grow older. She and her group told me that even if I was tested and found that I am HIV positive from a young age I can still do well and succeed.

I started to go school where I rejoined my friends

in standard 3 when I was 13 years. I was able to pass my first examinations and made it to Standard 4. I am very happy that I am now in Standard 6 and believe that I will be able to go to do a course and become a teacher. Considering the way I have been encouraged and helped by the members of the OAU I think I will continue to work hard so that I can help others who will be in a situation like the one I am in future.



The Story of Masautso

My name is Masautso from Kalolo village and I am aged 18 years. My father died when I was 12 years old in Standard 5 in primary school. I was then

encouraged by my relatives to go and work as a cattle minder for some well-to-do person in a distant village in Mchinji district. This meant dropping out of school at that point.

One time, I came to visit my family in the village where I met some OAU members who encouraged me to stay and never go back to my work of herding cattle and that they could talk to the leadership at Consol Homes who had a centre in our village so that I could

go back to school. This happened and I returned to school though my age was older than many of those that were in my class. My friends encouraged me that I could work hard so that I could go to secondary school. I worked hard until I reached Standard 8 to sit for government examinations to go to secondary school.

To study well, there was need for us to stay at a self-help boarding at the primary school so that we could read in the night. But my mother was so poor that she could not give me K200 that was required for paraffin besides contributing to food. Even at home, we had not sufficient food. The orphan MP of the OAU in my village shared the story of my situation with other children in the OAU. They agreed to find some money to help me to pay for paraffin and that they would ask the leadership for my food at the boarding.

Our village president was a girl called Chisomo Dawa who talked with the adults at Consol Homes. Then a visitor came to Consol Homes the same day that they chose to donate to the self-help projects of the OAU. The president and her MPs agreed to give me the money from that donation. I paid and I was able to study well and passed my examinations. I am now in Form 3 and believe I will do well at my school certificate examinations.

Conclusion



Three “royal paths” for children’s wellbeing

One main conclusion after a decade’s work mobilising children and youth into their own child- and youth-led organisations, namely VSI and Rafiki Mdogo, is that there are three pillars that are essential for the wellbeing of children. These are organisation, participation and material support.

Organisation refers to mobilisation of children and youth into their own organisation around common and special interests. Participation refers to the degree of meaningful engagement, agency and autonomy these children have within the organisation, and material support refers to the critical need many vulnerable children in crisis have for support that goes beyond “talking cures” and conventional psychosocial interventions.

Children as social agents and “protagonist”

Child-led organisations acknowledge and develop the huge potential of children to become active agents

within their own social environment, as well as their potential to influence other children and adults. In the African cultural context the norm prevails that “children should be seen, but not heard”. Children too easily become – in the language of the great Brazilian Educator, Paulo Frere – “people of no consequences”. Child-led organisations enable children to find their voices and become heard, as well as considered, and appreciated.

In a word, child-led organisations enable children to become “protagonists.” A “protagonist” refers to somebody who is an innovator, a leader, and a spokesperson. The term “protagonism” in the context of children has been developed in Latin-American in the last twenty years. It refers to the fact that many children in developing countries work long hours, assume increasing responsibilities and contribute economically to their families. The term reiterates that “children have the right of not only being protected from dangers and risks, but that they also have a part to play in society from an early stage and should therefore participate in whatever matters relate to

them – both in the short- and in the long-term” (Manfred Liebel et al. “Working Children’s Protagonism – Social Movements in Latin America \Africa and Asia”, Frankfurt a.M. 2001).

Stigma and normalisation

There is a debated question around whether special interest groups of children should organise themselves around a shared common interest (e.g. the special needs of orphans, or as members of child-headed households, or street children) especially where stigma around these categorisations exist. The question is whether such mobilisation will result in more “separate development”, discrimination and stigma, or whether the mobilisation will reduce the stigma and discrimination and lead to more integration in the social environment. Experience shows that stigma and discrimination – as a socially grounded perception – cannot easily be diminished through individual behaviour and action but rather through collective actions. There was clear evidence from the VSI evaluation that “caretakers, elderly people and community leaders see the VSI members, most

of whom are orphans, as hard working and well behaved. They also see them as having many friends and supporting each other. It is clear that being part of VSI has changed their identity from that of 'orphan' to a "contributing member of the community." A Community Leader focused on this "normalisation" process and said that "these children are enabled to live like normal children and not to be abnormal... Members help each other, they safeguard each other, they cooperate." (Glynis Clatcherthy & David Donald "Impact Evaluation of the VSI (Vijana Simama Imara) organisation and the Rafiki Mdogo group of the HUMULIZA orphan project", Nshamba, 2005 (www.humuliza.org/evaluation).

Child-led organisation in the times of HIV and AIDS

Orphaned children and youth and children living with HIV-infected parents or old grandparents increasingly assume roles that were once traditionally in the adult domain. A number of new forms for family structures have emerged. Examples are the "child-headed household" – where children and youth care for younger siblings or for ailing parents or frail grandparents and dealing with financial problems. Another example is the "elderly-headed household" – where the elderly look after their own adult children

who might be ailing as well as having to look after young grandchildren.

Thus new roles occupied by children and youth challenge an African cultural context where children are mostly expected to be obedient and submissive but suddenly find themselves assuming roles they are not prepared for and which are not culturally legitimised.

In such a scenario, cultural conflicts are inevitable and children are now likely to be regarded by adults, for example, as "lacking in good manners" and not being subservient enough. A child-led organisation that truly represents orphans may well lead to a process of transformation of cultural norms and to a process of legitimacy of new child behaviours which are forced by the impact of HIV and AIDS.

What may be difficult to express at an individual level because of lack of legitimacy, may however be possible through an organised representative body. Again the voice of a community leader during the VSI evaluation referring to this transformation process on a community level said, "I think that the basic foundation which has been made (by VSI) will help the children not be mistreated or cheated because they have lost their parents. The community will feel responsibility even if the project was to stop."

Child-led organisations: A School for Life Skills

By building organisational or collective responses to their common needs, children and youth not only begin to address these needs, but also learn other crucial life skills that include communication skills, negotiating skills, administrative skills, etc. What these organisations do or undertake as activities, or what "interventions" they implement, are all secondary. What is primary, is that children and youth begin to organise and mobilise themselves into structures and social groupings through which a broad range of psycho-social-economic skills/knowledge can be developed.

Child-led organisation as a tool for crisis management

Loss of parents, being extremely poor, or being involved in conflict is described as a crisis situation where situational and social demands are beyond a child's existing capacity to act, react and cope. Ulich (Georg Hoermann et al. Handbuch der psychosozialen Intervention, Opladen, 1988) defines "crisis" as a "stressful, burdening and temporary process of change within a person, which is characterized by:

- an interruption of the continuity of experience and acting
- a partial disintegration of the hitherto capacity to organise its life

- a destabilization in the emotional realm with a central characteristic of self-doubt.

With regard to “crisis intervention”, most people in a crisis look for non-professional support in their own environment, i.e., from friends, neighbours, family members, church, peers etc. This form of social support is therefore understood as external support which is accessible through relationships and contacts in the social environment and which contribute to maintain the health and to cope with psychological or somatic stress. Studies (e.g. F. Nestmann in “Handbuch der psychosozialen Intervention”, Opladen, 1988) which investigate resilience in children suggest that beside the individual immunisation system there is a “social immunisation system” which acts as a support system and buffer between stressful life events and the psychological and physical consequences for health.

The interviews with the children strongly suggest that a child-led-organisation is an efficient and effective source of such psychosocial support in the midst of a terrible and unrelenting crisis (the multiple and worsening impacts of HIV and AIDS and poverty). The mobilisation of children and youth into their own child- and youth-led organisation provides continuity, integration and stabilisation. Support can be directed at the existing problem and towards current stressors,

however the value of this form of psychosocial support is seen to be much wider in its impact.

A Note of Caution

In our efforts to promote and talk up children and youth-led organisations, we also want to guard against romanticising this species of intervention or to suggest that they are easy to initiate or sustain. The role of adults and supportive agencies remains key to their success. This theme came out strongly in the interview with MADaboutART. Having said this, finding a good balance between micro managing the empowerment of the children and youth, but not overly controlling and authoritative, remains critical and challenging.

Value for Money

While it is not only orphaned children who are vulnerable, Southern and Eastern Africa has the unenviable record of having the world's highest proportion of orphaned children with the best available estimates suggesting that between 13 and 15% of children may be single or double orphans (UNICEF, 2006). UNAIDS (2006) estimated that by the end of 2005, there were approximately 16 285 000 AIDS orphans in the 13 countries in which REPSI currently operates.

The VSI and Rafiki Mdogo experience has demonstrated that mobilising children and youth into their own child- and youth-led organisations is an approach that is able to reach significant numbers of children in a particular area, and that the impact is improved nutrition, health and psychosocial wellbeing, at a cost of only US\$ 65–70 per child per year (two-thirds of this goes directly to children in the form of cash, materials for house construction, medical support, school support or training).

By any standards, from the point of donors, in terms of the outcomes achieved, this cost per child is good value for money. If every funder and every agency purporting to address these issues ensured that at least a small percentage of their total budgets was being spent or directed in this way, it might be easier for them to sleep at night knowing their money and the work they do is definitely making a difference.

There are many who question the industry that has come to surround the AIDS pandemic. It is estimated that the 2006 International HIV/AIDS conference held in Toronto in 2006 cost in the region of US\$100 million with almost every cent paid for in one way or another from donor money. Without suggesting that there is no value to these kind of conferences, which fill the annual global calendar week after week, there

are many who question the “value for money” impact of these high cost, “talk shop” kind type of events. By directing this kind of money to build children’s organisations through which to disburse unconditional cash transfers, costing only \$1.5 per child per month, using this approach, it becomes possible to ensure a major impact – improved material and psychosocial wellbeing for 1 million children per annum (Morgan Jonathan, Orphaned children and Money, Building Children’s Organisations so that Direct Cash Transfers Translate into Cost Effective, High Impact Investments in Human Capital, a reflection on the work of Kurt Madoerin, REPSSI working paper, 2006).

If you would like to measure how far you (the supporting or patron organisation) is on the way to developing a truly child- and youth-led organisation, here is a rapid assessment tool. Either just tick into the empty boxes below, or write some brief notes.

| Indicator | Fully Achieved | Room for improvement |
|---|----------------|----------------------|
| Children elect their own leaders | | |
| Selection and admission for new child-members is done by the children based on transparent criteria and procedures which have been elaborated by the children | | |
| Children get a minimum of 30 days training included all the trainings in your organisation addressed to children | | |
| The significant responsibilities your organisation has delegated to children adds up to at least 5 minor or major delegated issues. | | |
| Children meet amongst themselves regularly and where these meetings are organised by the children | | |
| The activities children do themselves for themselves add up to at least 4 activities? | | |



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