

Bottlenecks and Drip-feeds

Channelling resources to communities responding to orphans and vulnerable children in southern Africa

Executive summary

One of the biggest challenges in southern Africa is how to support the huge and growing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children within their own communities. Small groups of committed community members are already caring for children – but are in urgent need of more funds and technical support to ensure all orphans and vulnerable children receive the support they need.

This briefing document summarises findings from recent research by Save the Children UK in southern Africa and offers key recommendations.¹ It identifies a number of ‘bottlenecks’ that are stopping the smooth flow of funds to support community initiatives:

- providing resources to communities is not taken seriously at global and national level
- current mechanisms do not allow for resource ‘flows’ that reach community-based organisations (CBOs)²
- lack of clarity about the numbers of children reached and the quality of interventions
- donors and governments are not held accountable for spending to support community initiatives.

Southern Africa is in the middle of a protracted and unprecedented disaster, and with HIV/AIDS at its centre, the consequences for children are tragic. More than 12 million children in sub-Saharan Africa have already been orphaned, and millions more are living with sick parents.

Faced with huge numbers of vulnerable children, communities are fighting back, providing care and support. These small-scale, local initiatives can best understand the needs of children in their communities. Indeed, in many countries in Africa, the most effective ‘aid’ currently consists of the poor helping the destitute. Out-of-pocket spending on HIV/AIDS represents the largest single component of overall HIV/AIDS spending in most countries in

sub-Saharan Africa. In Rwanda it is as high as 93 per cent of overall spending on HIV/AIDS.³

International funding for HIV/AIDS programmes has increased dramatically in recent years. By 2007, global resources for HIV/AIDS are expected to expand to \$10 billion. An analysis of reported funding in the 17 most affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa suggested that funding for orphans and vulnerable children in 2003 was around \$200–\$300 million.⁴ A number of key international initiatives in the developing world – such as the US Government’s PEPFAR programme, the World Bank’s MAP programme and the UK Department for International Development’s HIV strategy – specifically recognise the importance of supporting vulnerable children and



state that channelling resources to community level is a priority. Too little of this money is currently reaching community initiatives.

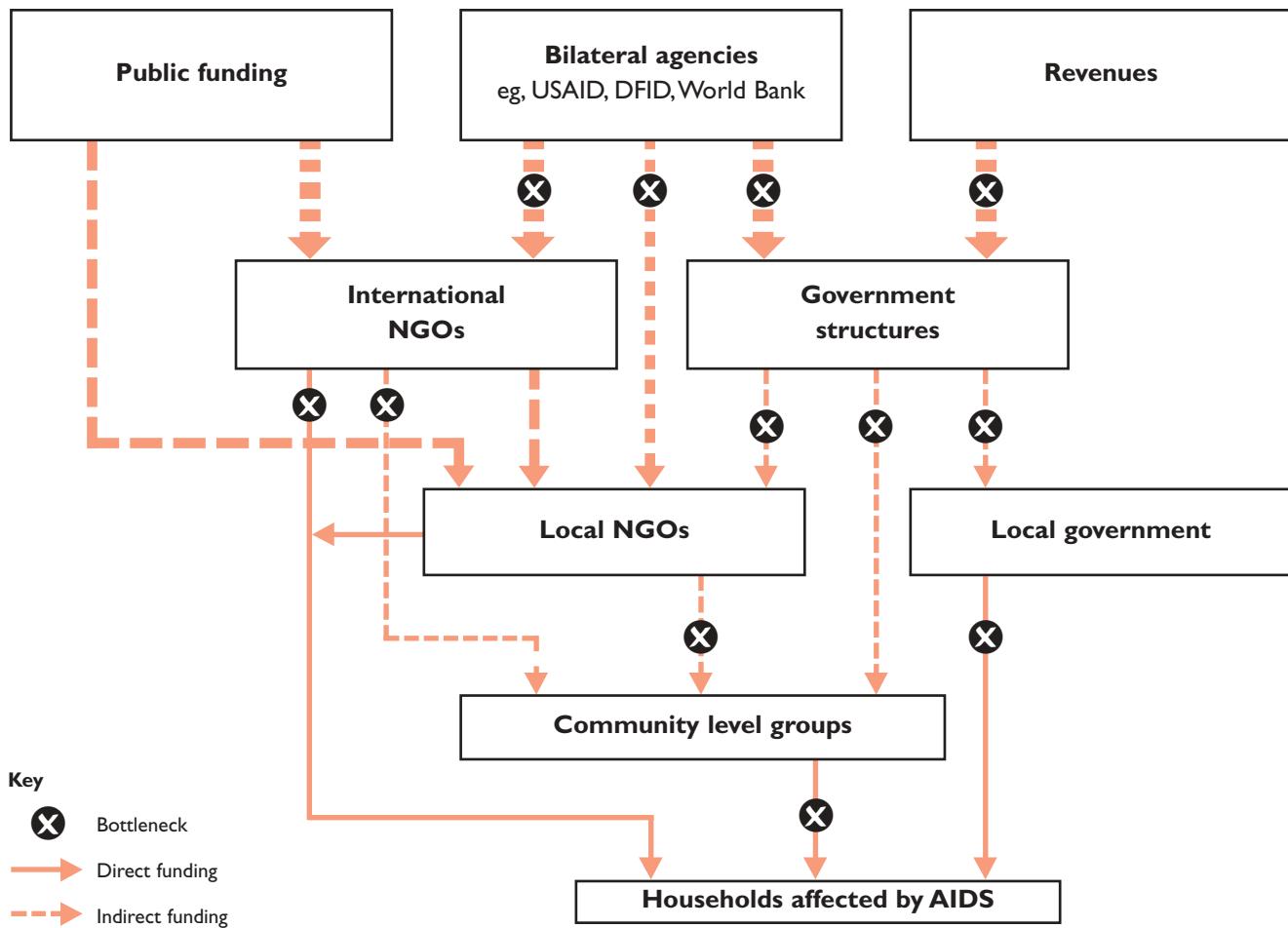
Getting resources to community organisations

As the flowchart below shows, the routes for getting funding from governments and donors to community organisations are long and complex. Central government money is cascaded down through departments, different governmental levels and through sub-contracted organisations. Our research found bottlenecks at *every* level.

Resource flows at the top of the flow chart are increasing. However, there are bottlenecks at all levels of disbursement, where money gets ‘blocked’, and

much of it never reaches community groups. The money flow is slow partly because of lack of staff and experience – from national level down to the smallest administrative level. Conditions placed at all levels on spending make it hard for community-focused organisations to access funding. It can be hard to apply for funding where there is little information about what is available, and where and how to apply. The process for making applications is also often demanding and time-consuming. Often donors and big international or national NGOs do not know how to ‘find’ small local community groups.

Community-based organisations need funding that is ‘drip-fed’ – continuous, steady, small amounts of resources. The research found only a few examples of successful mechanisms for disbursing small amounts of funds to large numbers of CBOs.



Bottlenecks and Drip-feeds

Key findings and recommendations

Bottleneck 1: Providing care and support of children within their communities is not a high priority for donors and national decision-making bodies.

International frameworks⁵ recognise communities as the front line of support for children. However, this is not translating into adequate resourcing for care and support of the most vulnerable.

More work is needed to test the merits of different funding systems and types of funding organisation, and to identify which schemes work best in different contexts. Funding mechanisms that promote local ownership and long-term perspectives, and which provide the technical support for small groups to improve their capacity to support children, appear to strengthen community responses. Effective mechanisms that were identified include community foundations and government–NGO partnerships.

Recommendation 1: Long-term funding must be committed to meet the needs of orphans and vulnerable children.

Donors⁶ and national co-ordinating bodies⁷ must:

- identify indigenous mechanisms that communicate well with communities and are able to get money to CBOs, and invest in these mechanisms to build their ability to make grants and to support CBOs
- evaluate a range of disbursal mechanisms – including the public sector – to decide which most rapidly and efficiently enable community groups to support vulnerable children
- share best practices in funding OVC programmes with other donors and national decision-making bodies
- commit to resourcing OVC programming for extended periods as part of long-term interventions on HIV and AIDS.

Intermediary organisations⁸ must:

- commit to ‘drip-feeds’ – long-term commitment of funds to CBOs with incremental increases at a rate CBOs can handle.

Why are community initiatives crucial in the fight against AIDS?

Since the mid-1990s, self-financing community initiatives to support the new crisis of vulnerable children have developed and continue to expand. Community support has always existed, but is now growing and moving beyond neighbourhood support to reach a much larger number of children. National social protections schemes are essential to reducing child poverty. However, community groups are more effective in offering holistic support – parenting, protection, and economic, psychosocial and spiritual support – than social welfare programmes or NGO initiatives that come from ‘outside’. CBOs are concerned with long-term impacts; are often able to identify and target those households with greatest needs; usually provide relief only where necessary and encourage self-sufficiency; are flexible in responding swiftly to household crises; tend to benefit households rather than just individual children; and are cost-effective.

For example, in Zimbabwe, the Bethany Project mobilised 656 volunteers throughout an entire district. They provided visits and material support to 4,952 needy orphans and 3,052 other children at an annual cost of \$20,000 or \$2.50 per child.

“Donors and their partners should take the risk and trust communities. Unless this is done, we will continue to have a separation between donor-funded programmes and community initiatives.”

Mozambican CBO

“We don’t need a lot, just the necessary.”

Mozambican CBO



Bottleneck 2: Existing funding arrangements are not designed to meet community needs, making it difficult for CBOs to access available funding.

Despite the professed desire of donors to channel resources to community level, CBOs are unable to access the available resources. At national level, there is little coordination between donors over allocation of resources. At sub-national level, multisectoral coordinating bodies do not always know which resources are available for community responses. When CBOs hear of resources or funding available, they find it is hard to access them because of lack of information, and cumbersome administrative procedures.

CBO respondents identified many obstacles to applying for and obtaining funding: difficulties in identifying funders; incompatibility of community groups' activities with funders' requirements; complexity of submitting applications; lack of feedback about the progress of applications; and delays in getting the funds. Conditions on funding are often inflexible – in one case, money was only donated for the upkeep of orphans and vulnerable children between 5 and 7 years old. NGOs and donors often require a commitment to their strategies and priorities from CBOs. This reduces a community's ownership of an initiative and compromises its sustainability. Examples of this found in the research include community healthcare and pre-school schemes that were heavily supported by donors but collapsed when donor funding stopped.

Different National AIDS Councils have had different degrees of success. Zambia's NAC took an innovative approach and allocated funds through a range of different government, non-government and faith-based networks. The NAC includes staff who assist in helping potential beneficiaries write proposals.

CBOs suggested that funding mechanisms should be modified in a number of ways: simpler application processes; better feedback on proposals; appropriate grant size; long-term funding; flexibility over how grants are spent and over time limits for spending. Furthermore, funding should be accompanied by capacity-building, in the form of both technical support and training.

Recommendation 2: Greater investment is needed at different levels of the funding system to ensure resources reach communities and respond rapidly to the needs of children, taking risks where necessary.

Donors and national decision-making bodies must:

- design and make public a funding plan that shows how different layers in the funding system link, and what costs are needed for effective functioning at all levels
- hold international and national NGOs accountable for financing and strengthening CBO financial skills and systems
- take risks in trying out quicker systems for disbursal, making use of existing networks, including religious coordinating bodies, and supporting intermediary bodies to be able to make small grants
- support intermediary organisations to be innovative, such as offering 'risk grants' to new groups (see example below).

The Firelight Foundation supports vulnerable children through grants to CBOs. Around one third of their grants are one-year 'risk grants', grants of \$5,000 or less for organisations who have no experience of donor funding. After one year, three-quarters of grants were considered successful and grantees received re-grants. Firelight found that risk grants strengthened leadership and increased community participation. Additionally, some organisations succeeded in acquiring extensive new funding from other sources.



Intermediary organisations must:

- help build the capacity of local organisations rather than carry out direct service delivery themselves
- strengthen CBOs financial capabilities and systems
- ensure that information on resources is made available to CBOs, using appropriate media and facilitating information exchange
- simplify financial reporting systems to ensure that small amounts of funding move quickly
- support CBO beneficiaries to ensure that simple monitoring of resources is carried out and reported upward.

Bottleneck 3: Monitoring and evaluation of impact is weak and support for quality programming is inadequate.

Monitoring and evaluation is weak at all levels in the funding stream. Simply directing more resources through a flawed system will do nothing without investment at all levels. Only when the capacity and confidence of intermediary organisations is strong and their mandate clear will they be able to support CBOs to ensure appropriate impact and coverage.

Because CBOs do not have paid staff they are not able to meet complex reporting requirements. The responsibility for ensuring quality, coverage and a holistic response lies with the organisations that provide direct support to them, usually a local government agency, faith-based organisation or NGO. CBOs also need support to reach the most vulnerable and to measure the impact of their work on the lives of children.

Organisations like the Southern African AIDS Trust (SAT) and AIDS Foundation of South Africa (AFSA) proactively identify partners, assess their capacity, tailor make training to address the gaps, and then provide a grant supported by a comprehensive package of capacity building. SAT's contracts with partners are between five and ten years. These organisations have monitoring officers supporting the partners to ensure that vulnerable children benefit.

Community organisations understand the situation on the ground and which children are in need. Effective targeting of the most vulnerable children has to be done at community level with the participation of children.

Recommendation 3: Technical support must be increased at all levels.

Donors and national decision-making bodies must:

- support and resource organisations that provide technical support to CBOs to improve impact measurement and effectiveness
- monitor disbursement of grants to ensure that resource allocation at national level leads to improved impact measurement at sub-national level
- promote mentoring of NGOs to enable them to become intermediary organisations
- ensure that children are included in programme design, monitoring and evaluation.

Intermediary organisations must:

- develop technical support skills, from CBO training to small grant making
- introduce mechanisms that can assess effectiveness, impact and capacity of CBO interventions
- invest in developing the ability of CBOs and NGOs to increase both geographic and programmatic reach
- consult with CBOs on developing appropriate grant-making and monitoring processes.

Bottleneck 4: Little data is currently available to track government spending.

Good OVC programming requires information to determine where gaps are and to prioritise spending. In addition, there must be control mechanisms that enable administrators to move money rapidly when required. Community groups must be involved in designing funding strategies.

However, most countries only monitor HIV/AIDS funding flowing to ministries of health or National AIDS Commissions. To date, we have not been able to extract government spending to support



orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. Without this information we cannot reasonably assess the quality of the response.

Recommendation 4: HIV/AIDS funding must be tracked to determine how much reaches communities to benefit children.

Donors and national decision-making bodies must:

- prioritise the tracking of HIV/AIDS expenditure on orphans and vulnerable children, particularly below national level, to identify where additional resources are required
- ensure information is available on the amount of HIV/AIDS funding actually reaching community level, as well as the operational costs with each sub-granting organisation
- build in-country capacity of independent public expenditure monitors to track spending of resources
- include CBOs in developing tracking systems.

Endnotes

1 This research involved a literature review and interviews with people working at local and district level, including: community-based organisations, faith communities, small NGOs and local government officials in Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. At national and provincial levels, government agencies, international and religious donors, NGOs, inter-governmental

agencies, local donors, trust funds and community foundations were interviewed. In all, 70 interviews took place with donors, central government representatives, intermediaries and community-based organisations.

2 Community-based organisation (CBO) here refers to an organisation that does not have paid staff and is supported by local contributions.

3 UNAIDS, 2004, *2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic: 4th global report*. UNAIDS: Geneva

4 Gutierrez and Bertozzi, 2004, 'Resource availability for HIV/AIDS and the funding gap', presentation, National Institute for Public Health; UNAIDS, 2004, *2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic: 4th global report*. UNAIDS: Geneva

5 For example, 'The Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living in a World with HIV and AIDS'

6 Donors here means all international and national donors supplying funding for orphans and vulnerable children.

7 National-decision making bodies include National AIDS Councils, OVC Secretariats and other multi-sectoral bodies with responsibility for orphans and vulnerable children.

8 Intermediary organisations here refers to government or non-government bodies that have a direct link with CBOs and are able to provide both funding and technical support, and take on responsibility for reporting to donors.

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The full report, *Bottlenecks and Drip-feeds: Channelling resources to communities responding to orphans and vulnerable children in southern Africa*, by Geoff Foster, published by Save the Children in June 2005, is available in English and Portuguese versions. To obtain a free copy of the report, contact:

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Electronic copies of this summary and the full report are available to download from the Save the Children website (www.savethechildren.org.uk) and are also available from Komborero Choga, Regional OVC Programme Manager in Save the Children's southern African region: kchoga@scfuk.org.za

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