



## Case Study Two

### Orphan Care and Self Mobilisation, Lilongwe South, Malawi<sup>4</sup>

#### Who?

Orphaned children in smallholder farmer communities located 25-30 kilometres south of the city of Lilongwe. The Tiyambenawo Orphan Care group was formed in March 2003 by three women, in response to the growing number of orphans in their community and the lack of assistance given to the orphans or the families caring for them. Many of the caregivers are elderly grandmothers. The orphans receive inadequate care and schooling, either because the caregivers are unable to provide sufficient food, shelter, clothes, blankets and school fees as a direct result of poverty, weakness or ill-health or, in some cases, because the orphans are stigmatised by the caregivers and their needs and welfare are not given the same priority as other household members. The women approached the village headman, who offered them his full support and assistance. The group increased to thirteen women by early 2004 as a result of this support.

#### What?

The group organises gatherings for the orphans every Saturday. The children are divided into four groups according to age, ranging from 3 to 15 years. In each group, children are taught songs, games, dances, drumming, sports, and lessons appropriate to their age. Issues of HIV and AIDS, stigmatisation of orphans, good behaviour and morals are addressed by the women through drama,

poems and prayers, with the aim of encouraging the orphans to become productive citizens and also to provide them with entertainment and recreational opportunities as a relief from the problems, they face in their daily lives. Activities for pre-school children help to prepare them for school.

Three acres of land have been allocated by the headman for the group to grow food crops. However, fertiliser and seed are in short supply. Through NASFAM, the group was linked to the International Women's Association of Malawi (IWAM), which provides grants for community initiatives of this kind. The food crops grown by the women is used to feed the orphans and sold to generate income. Winter crops are sold at a higher price than crops grown in the rainy season, as many people have depleted their own food stocks by the time the crops are harvested.

The group places a strong emphasis on the importance of education and assists children to attend school, although funds are limited. The group has raised funds for activities through contributions from the group members themselves. The women also labour in the fields in the area and contribute MK30 (approximately US\$0.25) each week.

The group wishes to start raising dairy cattle as an income-generating activity and to provide milk for the orphans. The feasibility of this is currently being assessed and if positive, the group will be assisted to raise capital for buying cows and be provided with technical training and supervision.

<sup>4</sup> Documented by Lesley Holst, NASFAM

### With whom?

The group has strong links to NASFAM through the Lilongwe South Smallholder Farmer's Association (a member association of NASFAM). NASFAM links the group to potential partners and credit institutions, especially with regard to raising capital, although it does not provide free inputs or loans, and also provides technical services, including marketing. An initial feasibility study of the group's project on raising dairy cattle has been conducted, with all costs being covered by NASFAM.

### What benefits and impact?

- In October 2003, the group registered 407 orphans; by February 2004, the number had risen to 657. Children walk more than 5 kilometres to attend the Saturday gatherings. This is a reflection of the great need for the care and assistance the group provides, and of the fact that no other groups in the area are providing it;
- A number of orphans who had stopped attending school have now returned as a result of the group advocating for the importance of education;
- There is a greater feeling of hope and optimism among the orphans;
- The women in the group have gained confidence in themselves and their ability to initiate income-generating activities and to deal with issues.

### Gaps in evidence?

At the time of the study, it was too early to assess the impact and sustainability of the communal maize garden and the winter-cropping project as they had not yet produced a yield. It is envisaged that a further study will be conducted to assess the impact of food security and nutrition interventions, and a further assessment once the dairy cows have been acquired and are producing.

### How is this different from standard interventions?

All the interventions were entirely self-initiated and have been conducted without any external agent or funding. Such examples of self-mobilisation need to be highlighted and shared widely. It is often reported by donors and NGOs, as well as many Malawians, that the dependency syndrome has become so common in Malawi that mobilising communities can be difficult. While there is some truth in this, it is also important to document cases where communities are themselves attempting to address the problems they face. Every household is affected by HIV and AIDS in one way or another through the loss of a spouse or close relative, through taking on the added responsibility of caring for the orphaned and the sick, and through the simple fact that when people around you are dying and families are struggling to feed themselves and bury the dead, the strain is felt by every member of the community. In spite of the fact that the resources of communities and individual households appear to be stretched to the limit, many people are still able to find the resources to assist those in greater need.

## Enabling factors?

- The women are highly committed and self-motivated
- Group cohesion appears good and the women have organised themselves as a formal club with a constitution and an elected committee with a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and treasurer. Absolute commitment to the group objectives is a key feature of their constitution
- The group has the support of village leaders in the area and, of equal importance, the full support of their husbands. This was highlighted as an important factor in their work, since without the support of their husbands, they would not be able to contribute their money and time to assist others outside of the household. In some cases, the husbands also work to raise money and contribute to the group funds
- The group has identified the projects itself, with the emphasis on achieving economic sustainability in the near future.

## Constraining factors?

- The needs of the communities in the area far exceeds the capacity of the group
- There is little support and assistance from the District Authorities in the area. The group attempted to involve the District Commissioner in their activities last year, but received no response. Community Development Assistants are not often seen in the area

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- There are currently no other NGOs apart from NASFAM operating in the area, so collaboration depends on bringing in partners that are new to the community.

## Additional ideas or potential improvements?

The group has identified the following plans, in order of priority:

- To open a bank account for the group for greater security and savings
- To raise dairy cattle to provide milk to orphans and to generate funds
- To raise chickens (layers) to provide eggs
- To establish a nursery school
- To acquire and operate a maize mill.

Other interventions that would increase impact include:

- Introduction of labour-saving technology
- Training on soil conservation techniques and promotion of organic fertilizer, especially if the manure from cows and/or chickens can be used



- ♦ Promotion of kitchen gardens, which, together with labour-saving technology, could also assist orphans who have left school to head their households to find time to return to school
- ♦ Food diversification should be promoted through awareness-raising as well as through the establishment of kitchen and communal gardens. This would have a significant impact both on food security and nutritional status
- ♦ The women need to be exposed to other groups and communities who have successfully tackled similar projects in order to learn from their experiences.

#### Implications of scaling up / scaling out?

- ♦ There is a real danger that the women will be stretched too far and suffer from burn-out if they take on too many activities and too many orphans. There is need for neighbouring

communities to set up their own groups to address the needs of orphans and reduce the demands made on this group

- ♦ Land O' Lakes will conduct a PRA exercise in the community if the outcome of the feasibility study is positive. This will help identify community resources and could mobilise other members of the community to take up complementary activities
- ♦ The group needs training on how to register orphans according to vulnerability. At present, they are registering all children who have been orphaned, regardless of their situation, and as such there is a risk of exploitation of the assistance offered by the group
- ♦ It will be a challenge to support the efforts of the group without affecting the spirit of self-motivation and self-mobilisation. Even if the group maintains the spirit, other members of the community, including village leaders, may want to encourage handouts from external agents.

## 4.4 Women

All of the studies reiterated the fact that women and their dependants should clearly be a significant component of any intervention aimed at tackling the social and economic impacts of HIV and AIDS. This is based on the knowledge that women bear the burden of care, both of family members who are sick, but also in supporting the dependants of those who are chronically ill or who have died, although both male and female grandparents can play an important role in caring for orphans. Women-headed households are likely to be under particular pressure and in this sense the HIV and AIDS epidemic is bringing the limitations of women's rights into full relief. The case studies presented reveal how even relatively small inputs which enhance women's access to financial capital can assist in developing effective income-generating strategies that benefit their entire family. Marked gender inequalities in the access and ownership of productive resources make the whole society more vulnerable in the wake of an external shock such as AIDS (Jayne *et al*, 2004). Therefore, projects and programmes that seek to ensure gender equality in participation and access will have a protective effect for the society.

## 4.5 Land rights

Land tenure or the terms and conditions under which individuals, households or groups hold, use or transact land, is a central issue that must be addressed. Laws and practices to define tenure are context-specific, often related to gender, and can affect people's abilities or desire to make long-term investments in their land. As afflicted households lose productive members of their families, including those possessing the rights to their household's land, conflicts over the inheritance of land may escalate over the coming decades (Barnett & Blaikie, 1992).

Jayne *et al* have argued that the cumulative effects of loss of land rights may turn out to be an increase in the concentration of landholdings within the small farm sector, with control of land shifting from poor to relatively wealthy households (2004). This is a likely outcome if relatively wealthy households are better able to maintain their control over land after incurring a prime age death in the family, and also if they are able to gain control

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over land assets shed by poorer households that cannot continue to productively use their land after incurring a death. Land disputes and possible land concentration over time are consistent with broader economy-wide predictions that AIDS is likely to exacerbate income inequality in many countries.

While an important coping strategy for afflicted households may be to rent out land that cannot be productively utilised after incurring a death, Barnett (1994) found that widows especially were reluctant to do this for fear of losing rights to their land. A major challenge for agricultural and land policy is to provide greater clarity on rules governing land rights, including protecting the rights of owners who wish to rent land. Developing land rental markets is envisioned to assist afflicted households to earn revenue from renting land that would otherwise go un- or under-utilised.

## 4.6 Orphans and Vulnerable Children

Orphans are an additional group in need of support as a result not only of the psychological impact of the loss of one or more of their parents, but their limited entitlement to resources such as land and even food, and their reduced chances of completing their education. Young people in general are another critical target

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Many of those affected by HIV and AIDS need special support to ensure they participate in, and benefit from, interventions. Children and young people need the opportunity to develop their own skills and resources by staying in school; they should not have to drop out to keep their families alive. Those most affected by AIDS simply do not have the time or ability to engage in development efforts, and need relief, social protection or welfare over an extended period in order to survive.

The increasing numbers of orphans and the collapse of extended family networks leads to inadequate transmission and preservation of knowledge. To counteract this trend the FAO have suggested the following strategies ([www.fao.org/sd/ip](http://www.fao.org/sd/ip)):

- Self-help groups and community mobilisation;
- Promotion of agricultural training and school gardens;
- Promotion of youth organisations;
- Encouragement of farmer-to-farmer knowledge-sharing;
- Documentation of traditional indigenous knowledge systems;
- Develop village-based business modules focusing on indigenous products.