



# The Need to Scale Up Livelihood Approaches: Social Protection Programmes for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children

REOSA Policy Brief

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)  
Regional Emergency Office for Southern Africa (REOSA)

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This policy brief is the result of three case studies undertaken by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the Regional Inter Agency Task Team for Children and AIDS (RIATT) on livelihood-based social protection for orphaned and highly vulnerable children in Malawi.

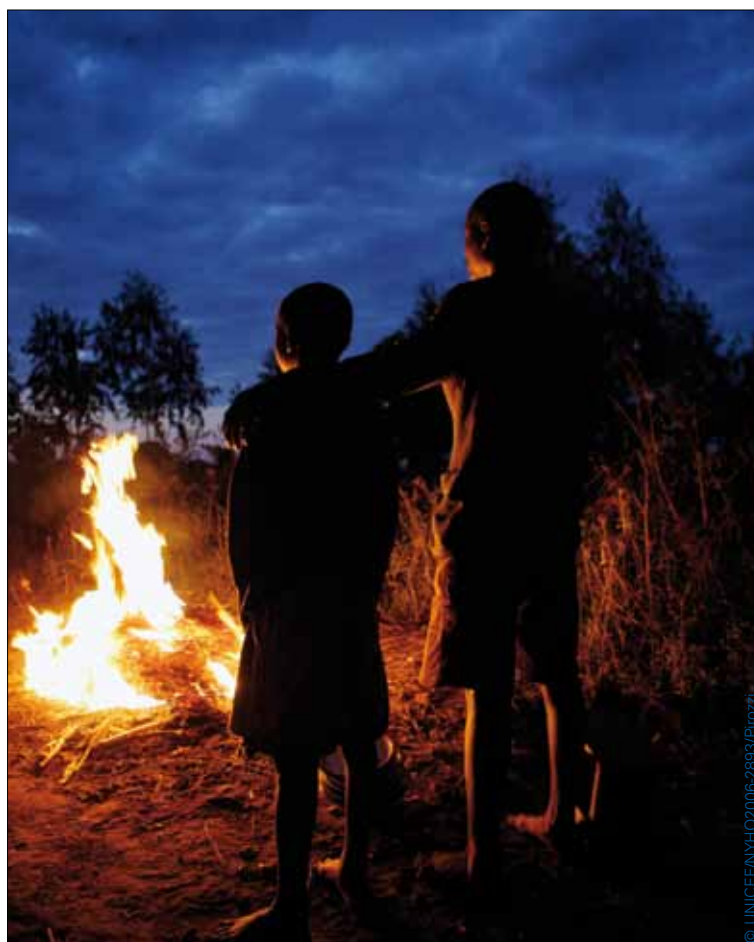
## The Context of the Problem

Since the first case of HIV was diagnosed in Malawi in 1985, many parents in their most economically productive years have succumbed to AIDS-related illnesses, often leaving behind young children. According to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development, it is estimated that more than two million children in Malawi could be classified as vulnerable as they face diverse and complex challenges to their survival which may prevent them from realizing their potential in life. In the absence of care, support and livelihoods, orphaned or vulnerable children (OVC) in the country – like those in many other countries – have resorted to piecework, sometimes migrating in search of seasonal work and transactional sex to meet their immediate needs.



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**Above:** Alice, learning to pound maize, at her home in a rural district near Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi.



**Left:** AIDS orphans stand by a fire on the outskirts of Lilongwe. They receive assistance from a UNICEF-supported programme that helps child-headed households.

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## ADVANTAGES OF THE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH TO OVC:

- Focuses on providing immediate solutions in the short term;
- Provides food, clothing and education to younger OVC;
- Promotes sustainability among older OVC;
- Encourages OVC's existing capabilities; and
- Reinforces community capacity and project sustainability.

Aedess Chikwasa, 14, prepares 'nsima' – cooked maize – on a small fire for her mother and siblings, in the family's cooking hut in a village near Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi.



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## Inadequacies of Current Approaches

In light of these problems, interventions to assist OVC have often focused on providing immediate solutions to get such children out of destitution. Most interventions have so far targeted younger OVC with support in the form of food, clothing and education through community-based child care centres and school feeding programmes, among others. Such important interventions take OVC out of crisis situations in the short term but usually do not go far enough to prevent them from sliding back into similar situations once this support is withdrawn.

So far, few interventions have been designed to target older OVC and help them utilize opportunities for earning and meeting their current and future livelihood needs. In a bid to strengthen sustainable

and predictable support to OVC, the United Nations and Partners Alliance undertook the initiative to identify OVC-related programmes that have effectively incorporated livelihood interventions. Livelihood approaches take a holistic view of human development and prioritize the sustainability and predictability of livelihoods over short-term outcomes.

The aim of the livelihood-based approach is to build interventions based on people's existing capabilities and assets rather than relying on external expertise and inputs. These kinds of interventions encourage working with and through affected individuals, households and communities through local structures in order to reinforce community capacity and project sustainability.



# Lessons from Successful Community Initiatives

A comprehensive assessment of three community-initiated and managed programmes, each run by one community-based organization (CBO) in each of Malawi's three regions, shows that communities have potential to provide comprehensive and sustainable care and support to OVC with minimal external support. For at least nine years Good News Children's Home in Chikwawa District, Chitungu CBO in Ntcheu District, and Tawona CBO in Karonga District have managed to provide livelihood care and support to OVC in their communities. Capitalizing largely on volunteerism, the three community organizations implemented the following livelihood-related strategies and interventions:

## 1. Agro-based

- Cultivation of communal gardens to produce food for feeding OVC
- Provision of farm inputs to capable OVC households to increase household production of foodstuffs for consumption and income-generation
- Provision of livestock to OVC for asset accumulation
- Raising communal livestock as a means of generating income to fund OVC programmes
- Development of agricultural skills for teenage OVC
- Facilitating OVC households to diversify food sources to include nutrient-rich food crops such as soybeans and leafy green vegetables.

## 2. Off-farm

- Development of artisanal skills like tailoring and carpentry for teenage OVC
- Communal maize mill for raising money to support OVC
- Provision of better shelter and accommodation to OVC
- Provision of clothing to OVC.

## 3. Health and sanitation related

- Provision of basic medicines to OVC
- Provision of potable water and sanitation facilities.

## 4. Education

- Provision of school fees to OVC
- Provision of scholastic materials to OVC.

## 5. Financial

- Village savings and loans for OVC guardians accumulate household incomes and meet basic financial needs.

## 6. Social

- Psycho-social support.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

CBOs play an important role in OVC care and support, but unless a deliberate effort is made to undertake comprehensive, sustainable and predictable care and support using a livelihood-based approach, organizations risk trading long-term results for quick fixes.

With so much already invested in CBOs and other community structures aimed at OVC across Malawi, now is the time to consider going the extra mile to enhance provision of comprehensive, sustainable and predictable care for holistic human development of the OVC.

It is time to draw lessons from community initiatives that have worked, and identify practical ways of scaling up these interventions so that more communities and individuals can benefit. It is time to set aside resources to support and scale up livelihood interventions for OVC, such as those documented in the three case studies and elsewhere.



**These strategies and interventions generated OVC livelihood outcomes, including:**

- Increased food and nutrition security;
- Increased household income;
- Improved health;
- Improved school attendance and academic achievement; and
- Improved sense of self worth and image.



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## NECESSARY ACTIONS

- Promote the livelihood-based approach in OVC programmes;
- Support capacity development of field facilitators, and
- Provide expertise that could be accessed by communities.

## The Way Forward

District assemblies should be enabled to promote the mainstreaming of the livelihood-based approach to social protection in existing and new OVC programmes. Meanwhile, other organizations should support these efforts by providing resources for training and the capacity development of field facilitators, and expertise that could be accessed by communities.

So far, about four district-level facilitators per district have been trained on scaling up livelihood-based social protection programmes for OVC in Malawi. The training was conducted by the Regional Network on HIV and AIDS, Food Security and Livelihoods (RENEWAL) and instituted by FAO, with funding from UNICEF.

The process has been launched through their joint effort and other organizations are urged to participate and broaden these initiatives.



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