

UNIT 7 READING

How is the United Nations Addressing the AIDS Crisis?

As you are reading this text, someone in your country has been affected by the AIDS crisis. People in every part of the world have been affected by the AIDS pandemic. Every nation in the world has had to take steps to address it. According to a recent United Nations estimate, 42 million people across the globe are infected with HIV-AIDS.

Because AIDS has had such **far-reaching** effects, in the year 2000, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, the Security Council took up a health issue - HIV-AIDS. The world body declared the spread of the virus a global emergency, a threat to peace and security in Africa, the continent that has been the hardest hit by the disease. The AIDS-Virus was considered no less destructive than warfare itself. In the year 2000, armed conflict took the lives of 2,000 people in Africa, while the AIDS virus claimed the lives of 2 million.

World-wide, the effect of the spreading AIDS virus has created 13 million orphans, 95 per cent of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa, a region where the crisis has been particularly deadly. Because so many have died, the very infrastructure of the region is endangered. So many people who play **key** roles in society - doctors, teachers, farmers - are dying of AIDS.

What is the United Nations doing to address the AIDS crisis? UN-AIDS and its agencies have brought some innovative ways of spreading the message that, first, people need to overcome the **stigma** of AIDS so they can come forward to learn about prevention, diagnosis and treatment. One way to transmit this message is by providing education and AIDS awareness training to local community members whose work brings them into regular contact with other members. One such local community member is Paul Lopez, a hairdresser in Mexico City. Paul's clients tend to confide in him, their regular hairdresser. Therefore, he was trained by a UNAIDS programme to dispense advice about testing and treatment of HIV-AIDS. Now, along with advice about beauty, Paul tells clients how they can protect themselves from the AIDS virus or where they can go for treatment should they need it.

Another crisis that United Nations programmes address is the crisis of care produced by the overwhelming number of AIDS orphans, 95 per cent of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa, where the spread of AIDS has been particularly **lethal**. Normally, when a child's parents die of AIDS, other family members, such as uncles and aunts, will take responsibility for the orphaned child. But because there are such increasing numbers of AIDS orphans and because the economic resources of some communities are so limited, it is increasingly difficult to find adults who can take in extra children. Often, children live by themselves in their **deceased** parents' home, surviving as well as they can.

A typical case is fourteen year-old Justin of Malawi who has to care for his 10-year-old brother and nine-year-old sister. Justin says it is very hard to find enough to eat although he does his best to support himself and his **siblings** through his job carrying food for

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merchants. Since Justin and his siblings have no one to take them in, they continue to live in their deceased parents' home, surviving as best they can. United Nations and its agencies such as UNICEF sends aid workers and mobilizes community-based volunteer groups to go to the homes of orphaned children with daily supplies of food, money and advice on how to spend it. The aid workers also know the necessity of encouraging the children to go to school. Children's chances of completing their education are cut in half once they become orphans.

In the Ugandan village of Kalong, for example, a tragic scene that is all too common in rural villages took place: six-year-old Nakeyeyune cried as the elders decided who would take custody of her six-month-old brother and other young siblings after both his parents had died from AIDS-related causes. In Uganda, one quarter of all families is caring for AIDS orphans. The poverty of many rural families makes it difficult for them to take responsibility for more children.

One way the United Nations helps single and **foster parents** to raise income levels is by fostering micro-credit cooperatives in rural villages. Micro-credit programmes, allow traditional craft-makers and farmers to form cooperatives and sell more of what they produce. The increased incomes enable single and adoptive foster parents to raise their income levels so they can support orphaned children. Such programmes have been especially successful among single mothers.

Vocabulary

Deceased: *adjective*; dead

Far-reaching: *adjective*; something that affects many areas

Foster parents: *adjective + noun*; guardians who temporarily fill the role of parents for a child

Key: *adjective*; essential

Lethal: *adjective*; deadly, something that can kill

Sibling: *noun*; brother or sister

Stigma: *noun*; feelings of disapproval that a society has about particular illnesses or social behaviors