

Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, 4th July 2011 — United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called on governments in the Sub Saharan region to strengthen support systems, which provide the basis for a more protective environment in families and communities to keep children safe and strengthen families

In sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 50 million children have lost one or both parents, almost 15 million of them due to HIV/ Aids.

The region, according to UNICEF has the highest rates of child labour in the world, with more than one-third of children aged five to 14 years being engaged in the hardest forms of labour.

Some of them are forced to grow up on their own, with limited or no support from adult caretakers. Thousands of children in Africa are experiencing violence, exploitation and abuse on a daily basis. The situation is especially stark for children living and working on the streets.

UNICEF executive director Anthony Lake says widespread poverty, conflicts, HIV Aids and climate change as well as violence in the houses are forcing more and more children to leave their homes to live and work on the streets, exposed to harm and exploitation. Many others end up in less visible exploitative situations, working in households, on farms, in mines or even in armed groups.

"These children have already been forced from the protection of their homes, only to be subjected to even greater risks on the streets," said Lake, adding that "On the Day of the African Child -- and every day -- we must do all we can to address the reasons why so many children are separated from their families, and invest in new efforts to protect them, no matter where they live."

Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Agnès Kabore Ouattara said the issue of children working and living on the streets in African towns and cities is only the visible face of large-scale violations of rights.

Adding that as a consequence of socio-economic factors such as poverty, demographic explosion, rural-urban migration, political crises, as well as inter-personal problems such as violence and rejection at home in dysfunctional families.

These challenges reinforce the need to strengthen the role of families and communities in promoting and protecting the wellbeing of children.

As a consequence, governments, with support from partners, need to invest adequate resources in the disadvantaged rural or provincial communities, to reduce disparities between regions and income groups as well as to fight discrimination based on sex, age, ethnicity amongst other factors.

Over the past years, a number of African countries have achieved important gains in the implementation of the child rights framework. Many countries have introduced social protection mechanisms including cash transfers, which play a key role in supporting vulnerable families and preventing children from leaving their homes to secure some income on the street or in other exploitative labour conditions.

UNICEF is collaborating with governments throughout the continent to create a protective environment by both fostering social welfare programmes and engaging in advocacy efforts to protect children from exploitation and abuse.

In Tanzania UNICEF is supporting the government to translate the provisions of the Law of the Child Act (2009) into practice through the development of rules and regulations that will ensure social workers, the police, educators, and local government authorities, among others, are clear on their roles and responsibilities in protecting children from abuse, violence and exploitation.

A landmark study on "Violence against Children", to be launched in the coming weeks, shows that sexual, physical and emotional violence against children is commonplace in Tanzania. A Multi-Sector Task Force, under the coordination of the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children is well advanced in developing a national response plan to prevent and respond to violence against children.

In selected Tanzanian districts, with assistance from UNICEF, police, teachers, health workers, magistrates and social welfare officers are already working as a team to respond to child abuse cases.

These local child protection systems, backed by the Department of Social Welfare and the Prime Minister's Office, Regional and Local Government, are ensuring rapid and effective response to children at risk.

Collectively, it is hoped these measures will address both the root causes and current conditions of the particularly vulnerable group of children commemorated today - Tanzania's population of children living on the streets, outside of family care and protection.

In retrospect, the Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance, commissioner Ali Rajab Hassan said that it was time the government and civil societies joined hands in the fight against child abuse, violence and exploitation.

He said that all children have the right to get equal opportunities that will help them shape their futures and what they become. "We should protect our children from harm, exploitation and violence in order to build them to become future citizens and leaders of good values and morals," he said.

According to the commissioner, Tanzanians should ensure that children rights are fought for and protected despite facing numerous challenges the worst of being an increase in a number of street children mainly due to either bad tradition, poverty, death and divorce among others.

Source: [AllAfrica.com](https://allafrica.com)