

# Circles of Support: Children's Voices



Produced for HDA



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# Executive Summary

## Background:

The Circles of Support intervention aims to support orphans and other children made vulnerable as a result of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. One of the primary objectives of the project is to ensure that children continue with their schooling, this can be achieved by creating support networks for the children in their communities and schools. The purpose of this report was to document children's perspectives of their lives and the project, in order to assist the project to better understand and meet the priority needs of children.

The Circles of Support initiative was piloted in three SADC countries, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland. This report is based on focus group discussions conducted with vulnerable children in these three countries. These focus group discussions gave the children the opportunity to discuss their lives and the challenges they face, to learn from each other, and to discuss interventions that would support them.

The goals of the research were:

- To document the daily activities and circumstances of vulnerable children identified by Circles of Support.
- To identify the social and economic networks of the child.
- To identify the specific resources that would allow the child to continue their schooling.
- To develop an understanding of how Circles of Support can strengthen the existing social networks of vulnerable children.

## Methodology:

Two focus group discussions were conducted in each of the countries. The focus group discussions were activity based and were conducted according to age with a primary school group and a secondary school group. Participating children were selected from a record of household contacts kept by the school convenors. There were ten children per age group for the focus group discussions.

## Findings:

The key findings of the report are:

- Financial and material assistance provided through the Circles of Support project have helped children to continue with their schooling. The Circles of Support project is a collaborative initiative that seeks to create support networks for vulnerable children in both schools and their local communities. The involvement of both the schools and community has been successful in establishing a wide support base from which vulnerable children can access resources in order to continue their schooling.
- Networks established through the Circles of Support project between vulnerable children and teachers provide guidance, support, and encouragement to children in the project. Many vulnerable children involved in the project discussed the central role that their teachers played in helping them access transport money, food money and school uniforms. These children also receive emotional support and life skills guidance from their teachers.
- Children are not only the recipients of help in the project but are also active participants in initiatives that find solutions to their problems. Vulnerable children play a central

role in the project by not only identifying the challenges that they face on a day to day basis but also being involved in finding viable solutions to these issues.

- Children in the project felt protected at school. Children wanted to continue with their school careers despite financial obstacles and household obligations that they faced. Many of the boy children involved in the project discussed piece jobs that they undertook on a regular basis that helped them to fund their school fees. None of the girl children involved in the project discussed piece jobs, this point needs to be analysed as it appears that girl children have access to less opportunities like piece jobs that would enable them to continue schooling.
- Children involved in the project were aware of how funds were raised. This awareness has led to increased understanding and appreciation of the Circles of Support project. Children are involved in various fund raising initiatives undertaken in their schools. These initiative not only raise funds for vulnerable children, but also raise awareness amongst all children about the plight of vulnerable children and the challenges that they face. The broad based involvement in the project of children, the schools and the community means that vulnerable children are less likely to be marginalised and ostracised.

### Recommendations:

The recommendations of the research include:

- Establishing and strengthening strategic partnerships between social workers and the Circles of Support project teams should be encouraged.
- Girl children need special attention within the Circles of Support project to ensure they are able to access the necessary resources to continue with their schooling.
- The active participation and involvement of children in the Circles of Support project needs to be encouraged and strengthened.
- Awareness needs to be raised about the vulnerability of children in their homes.
- Families that have adopted, fostered or absorbed children in these communities need to be included in the initiative.
- The implementation of a mentor programme would offer children support, supervision and guidance.

The report illustrates the potential that the Circles of Support project has in helping vulnerable children access the necessary resources to stay in school, giving them the opportunity to meet their development potential. On the whole, the research found that the project was addressing many of the issues that children themselves felt to be important. However there is still potential for the Circles of Support model to be more explicit about paying attention to other issues raised by children, such as paying attention to the burden placed on children by household chores.

The data showed that the project has been successful in establishing support networks between the children, local community members and schools.

# 1. Introduction

Circles of Support proposes to meet the needs of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) by establishing networks across communities and schools to help access resources that ensure children are able to remain in school. This is a pilot project. The project sites are in three SADC countries, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland. At each participating site there are 15 participating schools. The project relies on community and school level facilitators who are trained to know the rights of children, to set up Circles of Support groups, identify local, regional and other resources and to identify children in need. The Circles of Support groups will facilitate local level interventions such as support with caring for younger siblings or for sick parents, assistance to access grants or fee exemptions from school and provision of school uniforms and stationary. The project will adopt a "right's based" approach to working with OVCs. To achieve this it is essential that the lives and voices of children are heard and become an integral part of all stages of the project planning cycle and project decision making.

The pilot sites include both primary and secondary schools. In Namibia the pilot site area is Oshana Region in the north of the country about 800 kms from Windhoek. In Swaziland the pilot site is mainly sited in the Hhohho Region around Mbabane with three schools around Manzini. All schools can be reached easily from Mbabane. In Botswana all schools are in the Southern Education Region. The central town in this Region is approximately 100kms from Gaborone.

## 1.2 Purpose and Aims of Child Participation Research Component

The overall purpose of this research project is to contribute to strengthening the Circles of Support intervention and to identify problems or gaps in the intervention that are amendable to change. Further, the research aims to provide the project with an opportunity to hear the voices of children as active participants in the project.

Specific Aims are:

1. To obtain a picture of the daily activities and circumstances of children identified by the Circles of Support project, this would include details of the households in which they live and other children in the household and an indication of their well being.
2. To identify and understand the significant social and economic networks of the child and his or her household, from the child's perspective.

This includes identifying who the child naturally turns to for help with specific kinds of problems and how these networks may have changed over time.

3. To obtain the child's perspective of the options/people/places available to support him/her continuing his/her education. This would include identifying specific resource persons or institutions in children's lives (eg. Extended family members, membership of religious organizations)
4. To identify circumstances of children that may need focused attention and new intervention points if the Circles of Support project is to successfully support these children (eg. Recently migrated children who may have come into poor households, children in large foster families, children who are alone)
5. To use the above information to understand how Circles of Support project can support and strengthen existing social linkages to keep children in school.

## 2. How the Research was conducted

The field work was coordinated from HDA offices in Johannesburg. Partner organizations in the three countries were invited to choose their own field workers who normally work with children to conduct the field work. A child friendly tool that enabled both young and older children to participate equally was developed and circulated for comment by different people in the partner organizations in different countries. It was then finalised and sent for use.

Two activity - based focus groups were conducted in each participating country one group with children of primary school age (7-12 years) and one with children of secondary school age (13-18 years). The district and school were identified at the discretion of the in country partners.

The children to be included were selected from a record of household contacts kept by the school convenors and neighbourhood agents who were working with the Circles of Support Project. Sampling was convenient, convenors were asked to identify children who were likely to be willing to cooperate. In each country ten children of each age group participated.

The focus group discussions were taped. They were later translated and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcripts.

### 2.1 Limitations

- The focus groups were conducted with only two groups in each of the three countries ie. Swaziland, Botswana and Namibia. This means that the information here cannot be used to generalise on the countries.
- The field work was coordinated from one centre and this meant that communication was not always easy.
- Training on the use of the instrument was not conducted.
- The instrument was not piloted.

# 3. Background of the children

The children that we worked with in the three countries are part of the Circles of Support group in their schools. This means that they have been identified as children who need support and assistance. Some of them have been identified with the help of the community members who are part of this group and some of the children have approached the teachers that are known as part of the Circles of Support group for help.

## Family composition

Most children seem to stay with extended families. Only few children in these groups stayed with both parents, a few mentioned staying with either a mother or father together with other extended family members. Here are examples of typical families that the children live in:

*It's me, my sister, mother, my cousin and my father passes away.  
(G prim, Namibia)*

*At home I stay with aunt Sphiwe, three cousins and uncle who is sometimes not well mentally and an old old gogo (B sec, Swaziland).*

*I stay with my aunt, grandmother, uncle, grandfather, sister and brother. (Child, sec, Botswana)*

Some boys in Swaziland stayed with their families within the yards but were essentially living in their own separate houses as independents.

*Sis xxxx stays at home, she doesn't have time to cook. I eat and clean the house. She stays in her house, I stay in my house. (B sec, Swaziland)*

*Now my problem was I am staying home alone in the house, my problem was food and I had to solve it. So another problem was that I would bunk school, go and work so that I buy food. All the people, my father, stepmother are there when this is happening.  
(B sec, Swaziland)*

## Daily Lives

All the children did some chores as part of their daily lives. Some did more than the others.



Generally children in all the groups talked of not having enough time especially during the week to play. They could relax and do their homework properly only over weekends.

## 4. Challenges that children face

Talking to children revealed that their life is full of challenges. In the research groups a space was created for children to talk about their lives. Tools that were appropriate for the different age groups were used to help the children to participate in this process. The challenges that are discussed below emerged.

### Lack of time to study

*I start to study around nine, the latest. My sleeping time depends on the amount of work I have. If I have tests I sleep around twelve otherwise I sleep around ten if there is nothing urgent. Of course on other days I do not study at all if it is late by the time I finish.*  
(G sec., Swaziland)

*My other problem is when I am supposed to study. They send me there and there and I end up not doing it. She says she does not care why do I have to study.*  
(B sec, Swaziland)

*My main problems are food and not getting enough time to study as I had mentioned. My other problem is when I see a need to bunk class to look for food, the next day I find that I am in trouble for bunking. Every time I need something like food or shoes I have to bunk class to look for jobs.*(B sec, Swaziland)

*Studying is also another problem. We light a candle, and when we have run out we are not able to study. It is dark.* (G sec., Swaziland)

According to children in Swaziland not being able to study was not only linked to chores although they obviously played a part. There were other factors like lack of candles, lack of support from adults at home and the need to look for work because of poverty that contributed to not having enough time.

### Food in the morning and during the day

*In the morning when I wake up I pray, then go to wash. I wake up at five because I stay far. Then come to school. I do not eat in the morning.* (G sec., Swaziland)

*I wake up, wash, go to school I do not eat.*

*My problem is when I come from school there is no food when my mother is not there.* (B prim, Swaziland)

There is nothing to eat or cook for me after school. So that's where my problem is. (G primary, Swaziland)

My problem is that there is no money at home. Even if there is money they do not usually give us. So we come to school on an empty stomach and sometimes here at school the money that we sometimes get is not there. Then you stay the whole day without eating until you get home. G (G sec., Swaziland)

My problem is here when I come back from school and find that there is nothing to eat. And you'll find that when there is aunty, she keeps it for her children because I do not have a mother. (B sec, Swaziland)

My main problems are food and not getting enough time to study as I had mentioned. My other problem is when I see a need to bunk class to look for food, the next day I find that I am in trouble for bunking. Every time I need something like food or shoes I have to bunk class to look for jobs. B

Food problem is an issue. People I stay with are wasteful. Food that is bought for the month does not last the whole month. In a month for two weeks there is food and for the other two weeks there is no food. That is the way it is. (G sec., Swaziland)

I leave home without eating in the morning, during school hours I stay, you'll find that I haven't gone to ask for money from the secretary, stay for the study period after school. You'll find that I run away during the study period, I go home to cook. Then when you come to school the following day you are in trouble and they tell you to go and come back with an adult or parent. Sometimes there is a big problem you find that there was not even food at home when I left. This means I have to bunk school, go home and see what I can do (ukuphanda). B

Although food was definitely an issue throughout the day for older children in the group in Swaziland it was different for the younger ones. The younger ones only had a problem with food after school. This could be linked to the fact that the children in the Primary school were catered for at least one meal at school. It is also possible that they did not mention not eating in the morning because they have this same meal around eleven in the morning, which means that it caters for both breakfast and lunch. Children in Botswana did not mention food at all. This could be because in both schools children get food, one meal in the primary school and two meals in the secondary school.

In the case of Namibia children mentioned not eating but it was not clear whether this was as a result of lack of food or because they were expected to herd the cattle straight after school.

Afternoon time is difficult time I found because I look after cattle ... while hungry. (prim, Namibia)

Afternoon time is difficult for me because I fetch water, look for food also. (G prim, Namibia)

### Walking long distances to school and transport

My problem is that home is far from school and it means I have to leave home at half past six. School starts at half past seven. I am ok after we have just started, but I get tired very soon because I do not even eat in the morning. Then I fall asleep. (G sec., Swaziland)

My problem is school money and transport money to school. B

My problem is transport. There is no money to pay for that. (G prim, Swaziland)

I don't like the mornings because I wake up early as I stay far from school. (B sec, Botswana)

Children wake up early to go to school, most talk about walking and in other instances transport comes up. The use of transport seems to be depended on the availability of funds from the Circles of Support in the case of Swaziland children. When they talk it is not clear whether the children walk because there is no access to transport or they do not have money for transport, though a few have mentioned asking the Circles of Support for transport fares.

### School Fees

Many children except the ones from Botswana mentioned school fees as a challenge that they face. In Swaziland and Namibia children were expected to pay school fees, and in both countries there is some sort of an exemption arrangement for vulnerable children. In Botswana school fees are not paid in public schools as a government policy.

I have a problem. My problem is in paying school fees. Since primary I have always had a problem. The head teacher who was there at the time did not understand when I told him my problem. My older aunt had many children and she couldn't afford to pay for me as well. When the schools closed they withheld my report because of school fees. (B sec, Swaziland)

My problem is that there is no money to pay for my school fees. (G prim, Swaziland)

I have problems with getting money to pay school fees and also to read. (B prim, Namibia)

We need money. (prim, Namibia)

In Swaziland in particular children went in and out of school because of lack of school fees.

I stayed at home because there was no money for school fees. I tried and asked people to help me to pay for my school fees. (B sec, Swaziland)

The school had already opened, children had started learning, I couldn't go. My older aunt had many children and she couldn't afford to pay for me as well. (B sec, Swaziland)

### Uniform and other resources necessary for school

My problem is related to school. You'll find that there is no polish for my shoes that I come to school with. Sometimes there is no fat (body lotion or Vaseline) for my body. School clothes are sometimes a problem because there is no soap for washing the uniform. Then sometimes I do not come to school and someone helps out. (G sec., Swaziland)

Every time I need something like food or shoes I have to bunk class to look for jobs. (B sec, Swaziland)

I went to the social worker when I needed uniform. (G sec, Botswana)

I also sometime back went to see a social worker when I needed a pair of shoes and they gave me the shoes. (B sec, Botswana)

Although children in Botswana do not pay school fees as government policy they clearly needed help specifically with school uniform as they asked the social workers to buy them.

### Being sickly

My problem is that when I am sick I am unable to play. But I am able to come to school. I am sickly. I have an ear problem. (G primary, Swaziland)

I started school. I was good. I used to top the class. I started having problems with my eyes. I couldn't see properly. (B sec, Swaziland)

Only two children mentioned their specific health problems. Children in Botswana just mentioned in general the health problems they could face as a result of the sun.

## Lot of work

Difficult time is afternoon as I have mentioned all the work.  
(G prim, Namibia)

Afternoon is difficult because there is a lot of work to do.  
(sec, Namibia)

## Herding cattle

Difficult time is afternoon because I go to look after cattle. (B sec,  
Namibia)

Afternoon is the difficult time because I look after cattle while  
hungry. (Primary, Namibia)

## Fetching water and firewood

The bad time for me is in the afternoon because I have to fetch  
water. (sec. Namibia)

Afternoon is most difficult time of my day because I am tired from  
school and I will be the one to cook and fetch water as well as  
collect firewood. (G primary, Namibia)

We fetch water in big drums for laundry and we root out the weed  
in the yard and garden. (B prim, Swaziland)

Afternoon time is difficult for me because I fetch water, look for  
food also. (G primary, Namibia)

This is the difficult time for me because you go to fetch water even  
if it is too cold. (B prim, Namibia)

Although all the children had chores to do, children in Namibia seemed most affected. One  
also gets a sense that they walk far to get water and firewood.

We need water taps in our houses. (prim, Namibia)

I have difficulties/problems collecting water every morning and  
evening. I am very, very tired of this. (prim, Namibia)

## Cooking and cleaning

The most challenges time is during the day when I have to cook  
because at the beginning there is a lot of struggling to get things  
ready. I have to fetch the stuff that I need from the house and bring  
them outside to the cooking area. (B prim, Botswana)

This is the difficult time because my cousin tells me to pound omahangu. (sec, Namibia)

When I get home I fetch water, cook, and wash the socks. (G sec, Swaziland)

The most challenging part of my day is mid day because I will be playing ball. Because my feet get burnt when it is too hot (B prim, Botswana)

The most challenging time is during the day because I have to cook and it is usually hot. (G prim, Botswana)

Afternoon is difficult to me because of lot of work to do eg. Washing dishes, fetch water, clean house, sometimes they send me for.... (G primary, Namibia)

The most challenging time is during the day because I get sent around to run errands. (G prim, Botswana)

The most challenging time is during the day because sometimes when I get home and lunch has been prepared, I am then expected to clean the dishes and start preparing for dinner. (G prim, Botswana)

Children in Namibia clearly had a lot of work to do and they mentioned the afternoon as the most difficult part of their day because of all the chores that they had to undertake. The same could be said for Swaziland although in their case the work itself did not seem excessive. They mentioned not having enough time to study as an indication that there may be a lot that they have to do that sometimes leads to them not being able to study. However there were other factors that were also linked to not studying.

## Hot Weather

The heat is definitely a challenge for children especially in Botswana and Namibia. With excessive heat came concerns about their health as seen below.

The time that I hate , I do not like is the afternoon because it is too hot. (sec, Namibia)

I don't like to be sent for errands in the afternoon because its hot and normally am not given anything to protect myself from the sun. (B sec, Botswana)

I don't like the afternoons when am being sent around to do some things. Nobody ever seem to care that I am also tired during that time of the day. (B sec, Botswana)

I don't like the afternoons because we are made to work in the hot sun and it's not good for our health and you can nose bleed due to the heat. (G sec, Botswana)

### Over crowding

Over crowding is one of the known characteristics of poor homes.

I don't like waking up in the morning because my body aches in the morning. Sometimes I don't sleep comfortably. Some days we have visitors and so we will be crowded and we don't sleep comfortably. (G sec, Botswana)

In the morning when I wake up I don't feel very well because I don't sleep comfortably. We are crowded in room. (B sec, Botswana)

Overcrowding and disrupted sleep resulted in children being tired when they went to school. This had an impact on their ability to concentrate during school.

### Disruption of family life

Many children in Swaziland told of the changes experienced when a new mother was introduced to the family. In some instances the children's biological mothers would leave their fathers and the home, with dire consequences for the children. In many cases children chose to live their homes favouring instead to go and live with their biological mothers or members of their extended families.

### Arrival of a new mother

There are many children at home, they do not go to school. I am the only one who goes to school. Part of the reason we are not all at school is because father took another wife and no one cared that much whether we go to school or not. Amongst my brothers and sisters there are those who are older than me and others who come after me. B

### Domestic Violence

My problem is at home especially when my mother is at home. We fight with my mother. They divorced with my father, they had always had a problem. It is bad. Sometimes I am told that I am not eating at home and sometimes she would chase me away and say I will see where I would sleep. That is my biggest problem. (G sec., Swaziland)

## Separation of parents

I was staying with my father and mother. When I was 7 years my father left. I was hurt and I was now without a father. He went to stay in Jozi. Fine I felt bad but he was troublesome. (G sec., Swaziland)

After all this my father introduced a stepmother (in Swaziland polygamy is practised and is accepted). My father and mother quarrelled, my mother left and things changed and my life was not the same anymore. No one was responsible for my welfare and that of all my siblings. There was no food, no clothes instead I was depending on the neighbours. Afterwards I got someone who paid for my Primary so I had to stay in Siteki for two years, that is where I got my first class. After spending two years at Siteki I went home. Things had not changed at home, they were worst than before. B

In most cases the disruption of family life as a result of factors mentioned above proved difficult for children to handle. Children also experienced difficulty with having to move as illustrated in the comment below:

Then in Std 5, in 2004 my mother said I won't go to school because she no longer had money to pay for my school fees. In 2004 around Christmas time my mother passed away. It was bad. My father took a wife, they stayed together and didn't take care of us. This was worst. Then I left Lobamba and went to stay at my aunt's. It was very painful because I had to leave my friends. (B sec, Swaziland)

There were different reasons that caused children to leave their homes, however the most common cause of children's mobility was the challenge faced as a result of polygamous marriages. Although polygamy is an accepted and legal practise in Swaziland, these statements illustrate the negative impact it can have on children.

Mobility is however not limited to dysfunctional families as mentioned above. Other reasons for this mobility are discussed below.

## Mobility as a result of poverty/unemployment

Towards end of 2001 one woman who was a friend of my mum's talked to gogo that I am staying with now about my problem and gogo said she'll see. In 2002 I went to school and gogo was paying for my school fees. I was still staying with my mother but gogo was paying. I am not related to her. She is just my sponsor. In 2004 this gogo took me from Makhe (mama) and I came to stay with her here at Ezulwini. B

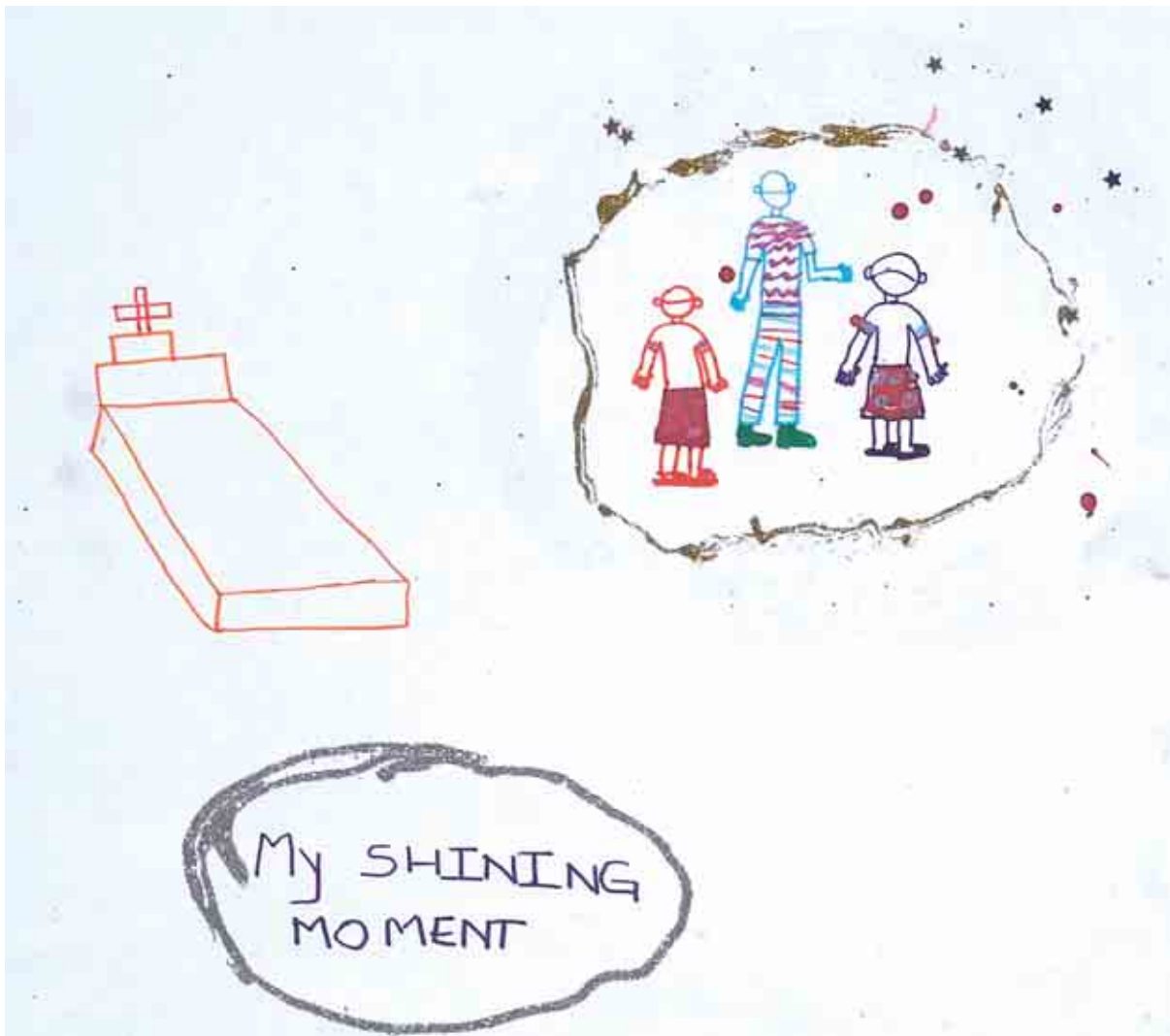
My father and mother were having problems. Then in Std 5, in 2004 my mother said I won't go to school because she no longer had money to pay for my school fees. In 2004 around Christmas time my mother passed away. It was bad. My father took a wife, they stayed together and didn't take care of us. This was worst. Then I left Lobamba and went to stay at my aunt's. B

### Mobility as a result of death

I was born in 1990. In 2000 my father passed away. I was in Std 1. We had to go to stay at Sisheni at aunty's place.

In 2004 around Christmas time my mother passed away. It was bad. My father took a wife, they stayed together and didn't take care of us. This was worst. Then I left Lobamba and went to stay at my aunt's. B

My father died and I went to live with grandmother. (B SEC, Namibia)



## 5. Factors that deepen the children's vulnerability

To understand the children's vulnerability further we asked them to reflect on their lives and discuss significant events that had brought either happiness or sadness. We analysed sad events in terms of feelings of vulnerability and the challenges that these children face.

Field workers were prepared and warned of the deep sadness and emotions that can occur during this activity and on how to handle this. They were also warned not to probe emotional issues that children were not ready to discuss. To ensure ongoing support only children who were part of the Circles of Support were chosen to participate as they were already in a supportive environment where their circumstances were understood.

### Unresolved Grief

This activity revealed a lot about the unresolved grief that children had to deal with especially in Botswana.

*The bad part is that I have not yet coped with the death of my mother and brother. I have never seen my dad since I was born.  
(G sec, Botswana)*

*My sad memory is that I lost my mother January this year and my brother last of last year. The other thing is that our father does not care about us, he stays with another woman. (B sec, Botswana)*

*My saddest memory is of the death of my brothers. Four of them. They died due to some illness. I lost one each year. The last one died in 2002. (B sec, Botswana)*

Despite the children's grief, they are unable to discuss their experiences with anyone. The children that do speak to someone are often encouraged to forget about their sadness.

*Time line depicting the children's lives and their source of grief*

### Failing at school

*I felt sad when I failed grade 3. My uncle took me to stay at SipoCircles of Supporteni because he said I am playing and not serious. I was not happy but I went because my mother was also having problems of paying for my school fees. When I was staying with my uncle, the female uncle was ill treating me. She treated me like the domestic worker of the house. (G sec., Swaziland)*

Last term my spirit was broken by failing and I got position 3 (apparently when you fail English in Swaziland you fail) and my mother had passed away in 2004.

I was hurt the last term when I failed. (G prim, Swaziland)

I started school in 1993. I failed grade 1. I was sad.

I failed grade 1. I was sad. My mother hit me. In 1997 I was doing Std 3 and I failed again. My mother told me I am not going to school again because it seems like I am playing with her money. (B sec, Swaziland)

What makes me sad is that I did not pass my Std 7 examinations very well. The death of my mother also makes me sad. (G sec, Botswana)

Failing a grade at school was a cause of sadness for many of the children. From the above statements there are consequences attached to failing that range from being beaten to being kept out of school. These consequences increase the pressure on these children although circumstances contributing to failure, such as domestic violence, death, divorce or lack of money are often out of their control.

## Labelling

When I have a problem with food I go nowhere. People in this place laugh at others, they gossip a lot.  
(B sec, Swaziland)

If Zakhe does not participate in class, they should not label him or scold him with his situation at home. They must not say things like 'you orphans you do not do your work because your school fees is paid for by government' (G, sec Swaziland)

It is obvious from the children's comments that labelling causes emotional distress and leaves these children feeling marginalised.

## Timeline

I was born in 1990  
Ezulwini.

I started schooling  
at Ezulwini  
Community Primary  
and I do Grade 1  
and Grade 2.

I then move  
at Ezulwini  
and settled at  
Lobamba with my  
grandmother at  
this time I have  
started my Grade  
3 and I was having  
some problems.

My first problem  
was I did have  
money for paying  
my primary fees.  
My grandmother  
tried by all means  
to get money for  
me for school fees  
until I reached  
Grade 7.

In Grade 7 the  
fees has increases  
so she could not  
afford to pay the  
money so she tried  
by all means to do  
something for me.  
All my parent died  
when I was doing  
Grade 3.

## Not being respected

I do not like the way the teachers talk to us sometimes. (G sec, Botswana)

I need to be respected (B prim, Namibia)

Children in the younger groups mentioned the following

## Being falsely accused

It was last year. They accused me of breaking a car window that I didn't break. It was another boy who did it and he ran. They eventually released me. I was sad. (G prim, Swaziland)

I was hurt when they said I play spin (tossing game for gambling). They hit me 3 strokes and it was not true. (B prim, Swaziland)

They hit us for noise making and we were not the ones making noise. G (B prim, Swaziland)

It is easy to see from above why not listening to children makes them vulnerable. It seems being falsely accused in the case of the above children is closely linked to not being listened to.

## Not having enough food

Yesterday I felt sad. I had not eaten when I left home for school in the morning. (B prim, Swaziland)

It was yesterday. One older child took my peaches away from me. (G prim, Swaziland)

After I had finishing writing grade 7 she found a sponsorship at Lomawalt House and it was year 2003. At this time it was too late for me to start my secondary level.

On year 2004 I started doing my form I here at St Mary's High School.

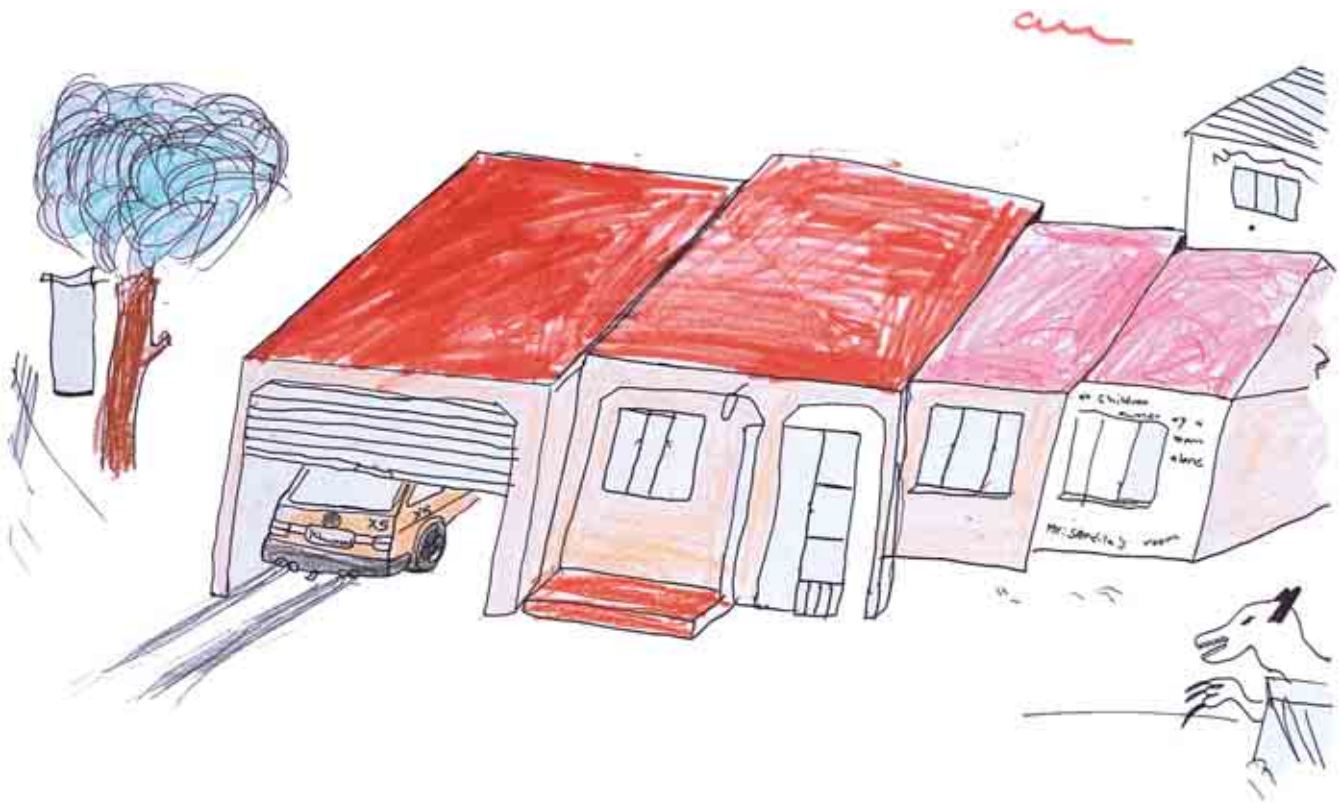
The sponsorship give the money and it was not enough for my fees and this makes me to start looking for the jobs during school holidays so that I should pay my fees. In this year I passed my form I. This year was a turning point to me because I passed my form I.

On year 2005 my grandmother died peacefully and I didn't believe that she was dead. Life become so hard for me as it is.

## Moving from one place to the other

Last year we moved from where we were staying to another place and I left my lovely friends behind. (B prim, Swaziland)

My uncle took me to stay at SipoCircles of Supporteni because he said I am playing and not serious. I was not happy but I went because my mother was also having problems of paying for my school fees. (G sec., Swaziland)



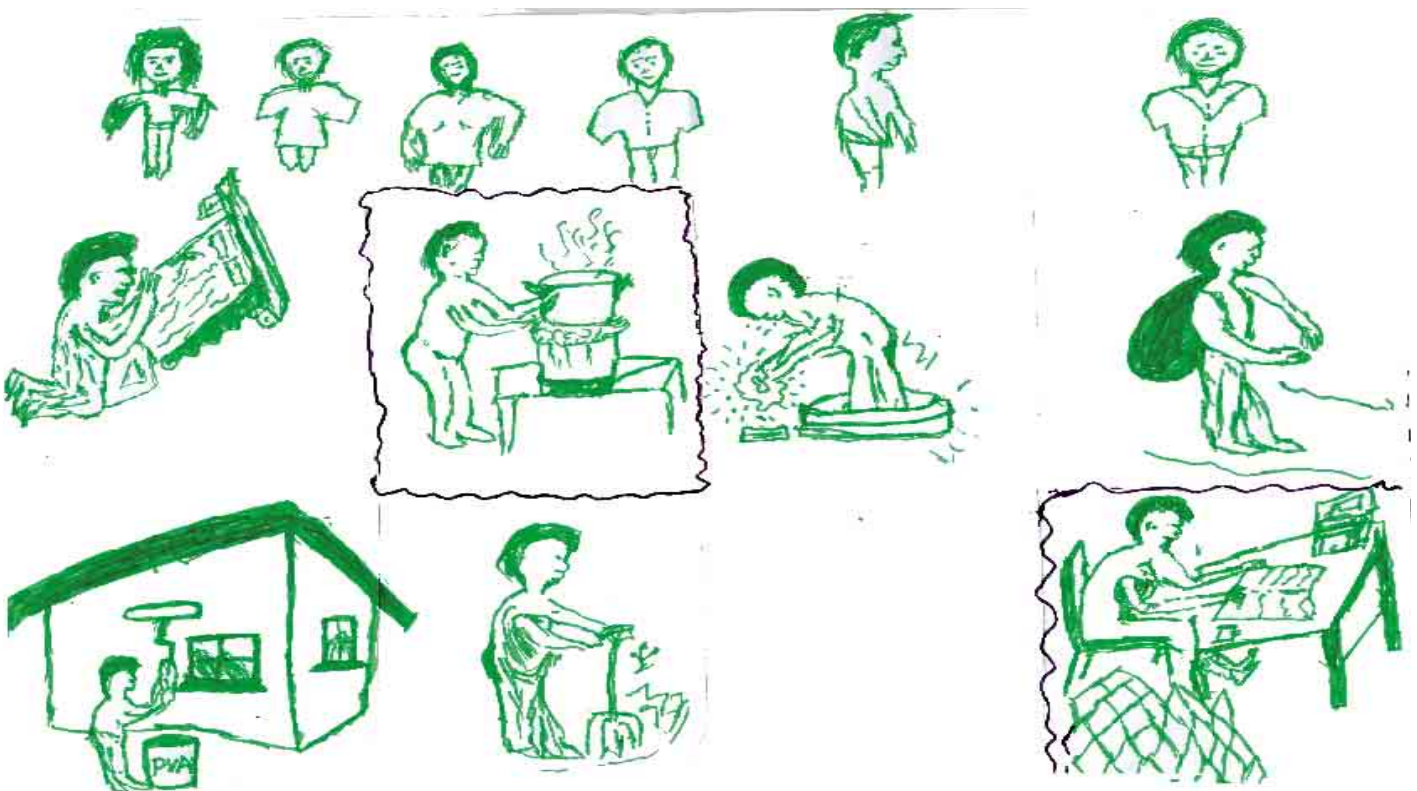
# 6. Resilience

After the children had discussed their lives and the challenges that they face they discussed how they dealt with these challenges.

Different activities were used for different age groups to give us an insight into those strategies that children have adopted to cope in their lives. Two boys specifically narrated their battle to stay in school and how they coped.

## Working for money

*During the school holidays I went to look for work. I got a job, I was staying in Mbabane in another old man's home. I was working around the house, cutting the grass, doing gardening. I worked. They paid me R70 a week. B*



Last year I stayed at home because I did not have money for school. I worked, made enough money but I also had to eat from this money and get some few clothes and I ended up without money again. So I looked for someone to pay for me this year. They said they can only pay for my fees and the rest I will do. (B sec, Swaziland)

### Looking for sponsors

I tried and I asked people to help me to pay for my school fees. I was thirteen years by then. I did not know anything about school. Because I was determined I used to look at the books of those who went to school, my friends. I would ask them how do you do this, and I got to be able to write, read a few things even though I hadn't gone to school. After sometime I asked another father (man) to take me to school. I started at crèche. B

One day gogo decided it is better to go and look for a sponsor for me. We went to Lozitha. They said they could only pay one thousand and the rest I have to see for myself. (B sec, Swaziland)

One boy in Namibia wrote of a potential solution for his problems.

I will make my business of firewood. I will sell them and get money and I solve my problem. I would go to people who have money to help me. (B sec, Namibia)

It seems that boys are in a better position to mobilise resources in the community than girls. None of the girls discussed ways to overcome the challenges they face. In the section below other children talk about the different people who support them and of how they support them.

## In the Community

### Older Friends

Hlobisile is a bit older. She is the one who normally talks to me about how to behave, what should I do and not do. She gives me advices. When I have a problem I go to Hlobisile. I trust her. She would give me polish when I do not have. (G sec., Swaziland)

This is the home of one man (ubabe) that I normally work with. He talks to me about many things including ways of behaving. I help him to clear the yard, and to till the soil or grow crops. B

This one is a guy I am in good terms with, what they call a man's best friend. He is one guy who has lived like me until he completed school. I normally run my ideas by him and he would advise me. I value his advice. B

It is interesting that children above have talked of being friends with people who are older than them. They have somehow managed to look for someone that they can look up to in the absence of such people in their families.

## Friends

My friends. When I have a problem at home I tell them and they sometimes help me. (G sec, Botswana)

When I have a problem I can tell my friend to help me with clothes. (B sec, Namibia)

I spend a lot of time with my friends so that I do not think too much. They also help me when I have a problem by talking.

I go to my friend's place where we can advice each other. (B sec, Botswana)

Friends played a very important role in the lives of children. In some cases the children benefited materially from these friendships but in most cases they just liked having a companion.

## Individuals

When we have a problem at home like food we go to prayer women. They help us with food. Makhe Dlamini. Makhe Mashala. (G sec., Swaziland)

This is our home. When there is a problem with food at home we go to Mrs. Dlamini and Mrs Magagula. Mrs Mabuza the community motivator (health worker)<sup>1</sup> (G sec., Swaziland)

Some of the people mentioned above are members of the Circles of Support.

## Health Motivator

The health motivator. She normally talks about community problems and hygienic solutions like where to throw dirty water. She would also tell you how to purify water for children or for consumption. (G sec., Swaziland)



Places and people they go to in the community

## Police

I used to do the garden at the police station. We used to grow crops with one man and sell them. Now this old man is on pension and the police do not allow me to grow crops on my own anymore on this space. ( B sec, Swaziland)

Here is at the police's houses. Sometimes they ask me to grow their crops in their gardens. Then they pay me. ( B sec, Swaziland)

To me the policewoman is very important because if I have problems and there is no one at home to tell I go to see her. (G sec, Botswana)

The police played a central role in the lives of community members.

## At school

### Friends

These are my friends here at school. I talk to them when I have a problem. They are also at the Health Club. I sometimes tell them when I have a problem that I cannot necessarily talk to the teachers about. Then they would offer me advice or offer to accompany me to the adult concerned. (G sec., Swaziland)

I like it here at school. It is nice. I get help from other children in the school and from teachers. When I do not have a pen or instrument they borrow me. Teachers help me when there is something that I do not understand. (G prim, Swaziland)

It is important to note that the children have friends at school, at home and older ones. All these friends play a different role in the children's lives.

### Secretary

The other important person at school is the secretary who helps us with money. Miss Nkambule (Circles of Support) is the other person that I go to when I have a problem. I talk to her about it.

Here is at school. These are the classes and this is the secretary's office. That's where you get help. You see Mrs Nkambule and the secretary and you go when you see that there are many problems now. You say your problems and they help you with what they can help you. B

## Teachers

Many children mentioned going to teachers when they have problems.

*This is Mrs Pemba (Circles of Support). She is the one that I tell all my problems. They encourage us to talk when we have problems.*

*When I am sad I tell my teacher. My teacher always listens to me and sometimes is able to help. (G prim, Botswana)*

*Teacher helps me if I am very sad or facing difficulties, he can ask and help me. (G prim, Namibia)*

*My guidance and counselling teacher is important because when I have problems I can go to her for guidance. (B sec, Botswana)*

Many of the teachers that were named were members of Circles of Support.

## Family

### Mother

*In the morning my mother prepares warm water for my bath and then she cooks soft porridge for my breakfast. After that I come to school. (G prim, Botswana)*

*I was happy the last time my mother gave me some money which I used to buy a rubber and pencil. (G prim, Botswana)*

*My mother helps me by paying my school fees. (B prim, Swaziland)*

*Mother. She gives me food to eat and buys me clothes. If I am very sad she gives me sweets and talks to me. (G prim, Namibia)*

### Father

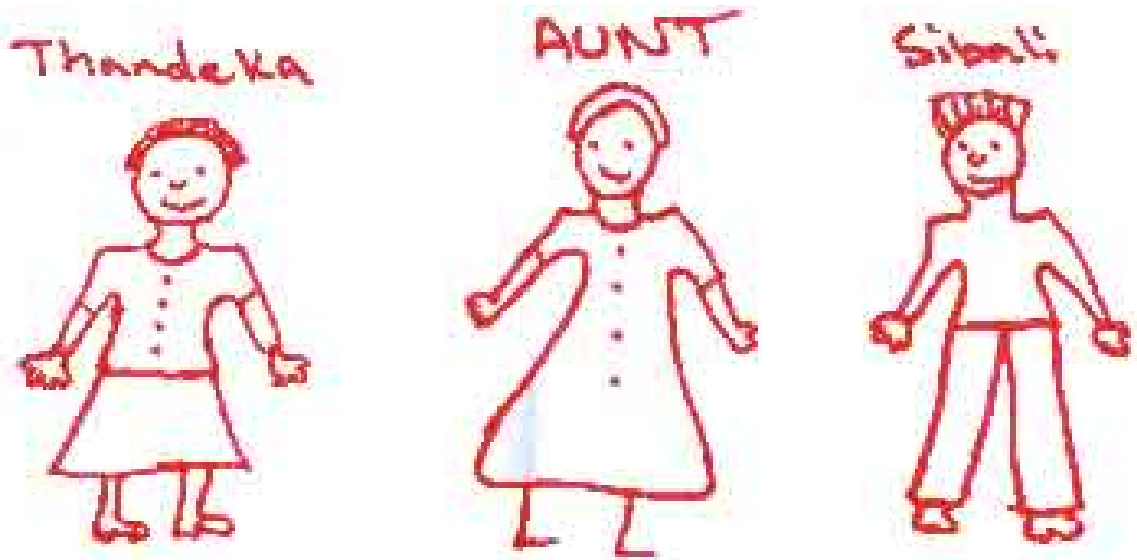
*father. He gives me food and buy clothes. (C prim, Nam)*

*My father helps me with making fire in the morning and my sister fetches water for me. I also have tea in the morning before coming to school. My father makes the tea for me. (B prim, Botswana)*

### Father and mother

*father and mother. They pay school development fund, buy food, encourage (emphasize) me to work hard and respect all people. (G prim, Namibia)*

Very few parents were mentioned generally in this report. Even fewer fathers and only one child mentioned both parents as people who take care of them. In most cases people mentioned the grandmothers, aunts and uncles as primary caregivers. The main reasons for this are not clear although children in the groups in Botswana and Namibia have written a lot about death in some of their activities.



### Aunts and uncles

These are my aunt's children. This one helps me, when I do not have shoes she buys me.

*This is my aunt at whose house I stay. (B sec, Swaziland)*

I go to my aunt's place. I am able to tell her that I am hungry and she gives me food. (G prim, Botswana)

*I go to my uncle's place when I am hungry and they give me food. (B prim, Bots)*

This is my aunt's place. I go there if my mother has agreed. I go there to ask for school things like uniform and shoes and books that I need (G sec., Swaziland)

*I sometimes visit my aunt so that she can help me do laundry. My aunt is a very nice person who is always available to help me. (G prim, Botswana)*

I like my aunt's home most. I like it there because I am able to express everything that bothers me with my aunt. She is able to make me happy and to advise me on things I can do. (G sec., Swaziland)

I like going to my aunt's place at eLove. There are many children there and we are able to talk and discuss together. At my aunt's place we laugh, we talk and we are happy. (G sec., Swaziland)

Grandmother and aunt they give me food and clothes and I live with them. (C prim, Nam)

In all the countries aunts played a very important role in the lives of children.

## Grandmother

My grandmother is important in my life because she is the one who helps me if I have a problem. She is the one who gives me food. (sec, Namibia)

The most important people in my life are my grandfather and grandmother because they are the ones who buy food for me. (sec, Namibia)

Grandmother she gives me food, clothes and represents me also. (C prim, Namibia)

My grandmother helps me. If am late she prepare breakfast for me. (G sec, Botswana)

I ask from my grandmother if she still have some change from the pension money. (B sec, Botswana)

Children in all the groups except for the Secondary School in Swaziland discussed the central role that their grandmothers play in their lives. In most cases grandmothers were regarded as primary caregivers.

## Places

### Church

Many children mentioned going to church on Sundays and others mentioned praying in the morning after waking up.

We also spend a lot of time at church. We go even during the week. We go to Assemblies of God at home. (G sec., Swaziland)

### Hospital

When I am sick I go to the hospital.

Here is at the hospital. I go for medication when I do not feel well.

I go to Hospital to Mrs. Mdluli. Mrs Mdluli used to nurse my mother.  
(G prim, Swaziland)

### Library

I like going to the library to research about my school work. B  
I sometimes go to the library to relax or study. (G sec, Botswana)

### Office of the Education Department

It helps us with the government sponsor. They pay for our school.  
I am sponsored by them. (B sec, Swaziland)

### Ground/soccer field/Pool

Here is at the soccer field where I go to play with my friends.

This is where I usually go at the pool room. Here I meet a lot of different people. People who are different from me but that I know and talk to. I am not that close to them but I do go there. I normally go here to source opinions. I would sometimes ask about what can be done if there is such a problem and they would start talking. Then I would take the best advice. Some will talk about not having money for school next year and what they are thinking of doing. In this way I get ideas and we discuss. (B sec, Swaziland)

### Community/Enkundleni

Here is at the community at Lobamba (traditional capital, traditional administration). I go there because there are men who like to hang around there. The issue is I stay on my own and I do not have friends. So when I am here I listen to the older people when they talk and I observe them. I try to build myself that way. B

Here is at the community centre. They normally call us as youth, to talk to us. The chief's daughter who is at the Department of Health calls us. We meet and we talk about problems. (G sec., Swaziland)

At the Kgotla. You can go ask for help if somebody insults or does something bad to you and the clinics are also important because they are the places we seek medical attention from. (B sec, Botswana)

Enkundleni. They help us when we do not have mielies. They give us. The chief gives us. (B prim, Swaziland)

They help when someone is dead at home. They give us food and borrow us a tent. (B prim, Swaziland)

## Neighbours

When I come from school and need water I fetch it from the neighbour's house

Most of the time I go to my neighbour's house because their children are my friends. I get good advice from here too. B

This is a home not far from home. I normally go there and sometimes paint as they are busy building. They help me by telling other people who need painting about me. So I get more work that way. They are the first people I painted for in the community, so they try to find more work for me. They support me, they help me and I try to ask for things that I need from them. B

Neighbour. Help me when I am very sad because they tell me to quit if my ... is quarrelling. (C prim, Nam)

The places I feel are important to me are the tuck shops and my neighbours. At the tuck shops I can get credit when am broke and my neighbours can help me when I have problems and I can in turn help them during their time of need. (B sec, Botswana)

My neighbours are important because they sometimes help me when am being beaten at home. Sometimes I am beaten because I ate food without permission. (B sec, Botswana)

I like going to my neighbours place to do my home work with some kids from that house and normally their parents help us where we don't understand. (B sec, Botswana)

Neighbours formed a network of support for many of the children interviewed.

Children also discussed the places that they do not like.

The place that I do not like is If Not (this is a well known club in the area). Others laugh. I hate it because it is a bar. Children rush from school to go there before their time (they are not old enough). (B sec, Swaziland)

I do not like it down there next to the shebeens. You find different kinds of people, girls who do not behave well, boys who smoke dagga. Even school children when they are there I do not know what happens to them. They just become wild. I hate the place. (G sec., Swaziland)

I do not like going to the lands because we spend a lot of time in the sun/heat looking for donkeys so that we can go and plough our fields.  
(G prim, Botswana)

I do not like a place that has a lot of people. When you are around with many people you end up doing things that are wrong. When people are in a group they like encouraging others to do things with them. I do not like that. (B sec, Swaziland)

I do not like living in Mmathethe because I am always hungry and it is very lonely especially on weekends.  
(G prim, Botswana)

I don't like going to bars and shebeens because you can easily and accidentally get hurt and you end up drinking and smoking. (B sec, Botswana)

Many of the children did not like communal areas where people drink and smoke (shebeens and clubs). These children believed that these places encouraged risky behaviour.

# 7. Happiness as a building block to Resilience

As part of resilience we analysed events or circumstances that brought happiness to these children. We tried to identify the tools that gave the children the strength to go on in the face of adversity.

## Success

I am happy because I am in a secondary school.  
(G sec, Botswana)

What makes me happy is that nowadays am serious with my school work. (G sec, Botswana)

I was happy though when I found out that in Geography I was the highest. (G sec., Swaziland)

I was happy yesterday. We went to play and I scored a goal. (B prim, Swaziland)

The time I passed in the second term I was happy. (G prim, Swaziland)

I was very excited when I passed the Home Economics test.  
(G prim, Swaziland)

This second term I have passed well and I am happy.

Performing well in school gave many of the children a strong sense of personal pride and helped to boost their self esteem,. They derive personal pleasure in doing and achieving what they have. This attitude and the way they talk about their success points to the inner strength that they have. This is captured below when the boy talks about his resolve to continue at school despite serious challenges:

That's how others gave up on school. So I thought of myself and my future. I realised I will be the one who is struggling in future then I decided not to give up..... I knew as much as I am old there was something that I can do for myself. I realised that everyone is for himself but God is for us all.

## Clothes

I was happy when they bought me Christmas clothes. (B prim, Swaziland)

They are made happy by small things that children who are not in their situation take for granted.



## Recovering Relative

What made me happy is when my brother recovered from a horrible automobile accident. (G sec, Botswana)

The last time I was very happy was when they told me my father has come out of hospital. I was excited. (G prim, Swaziland)

## Family relationships

I came back to stay with my mum and I continued studying at Esitjeni Primary. I was happy that I was staying with my mother and sisters. (G sec., Swaziland)

I was happy on Friday. I was with my elder sibling who lives in the lands. We did not do anything in particular but I was happy to spend sometime with them. (G prim, Botswana)

The above comments show how children appreciate love and being loved.

## Talking and being listened to

At the end of the focus group discussions children were asked when did they last feel happy and they said:

For me it is this morning. We talked freely, we drew and learnt. We learnt about us. (B prim, Swaziland)

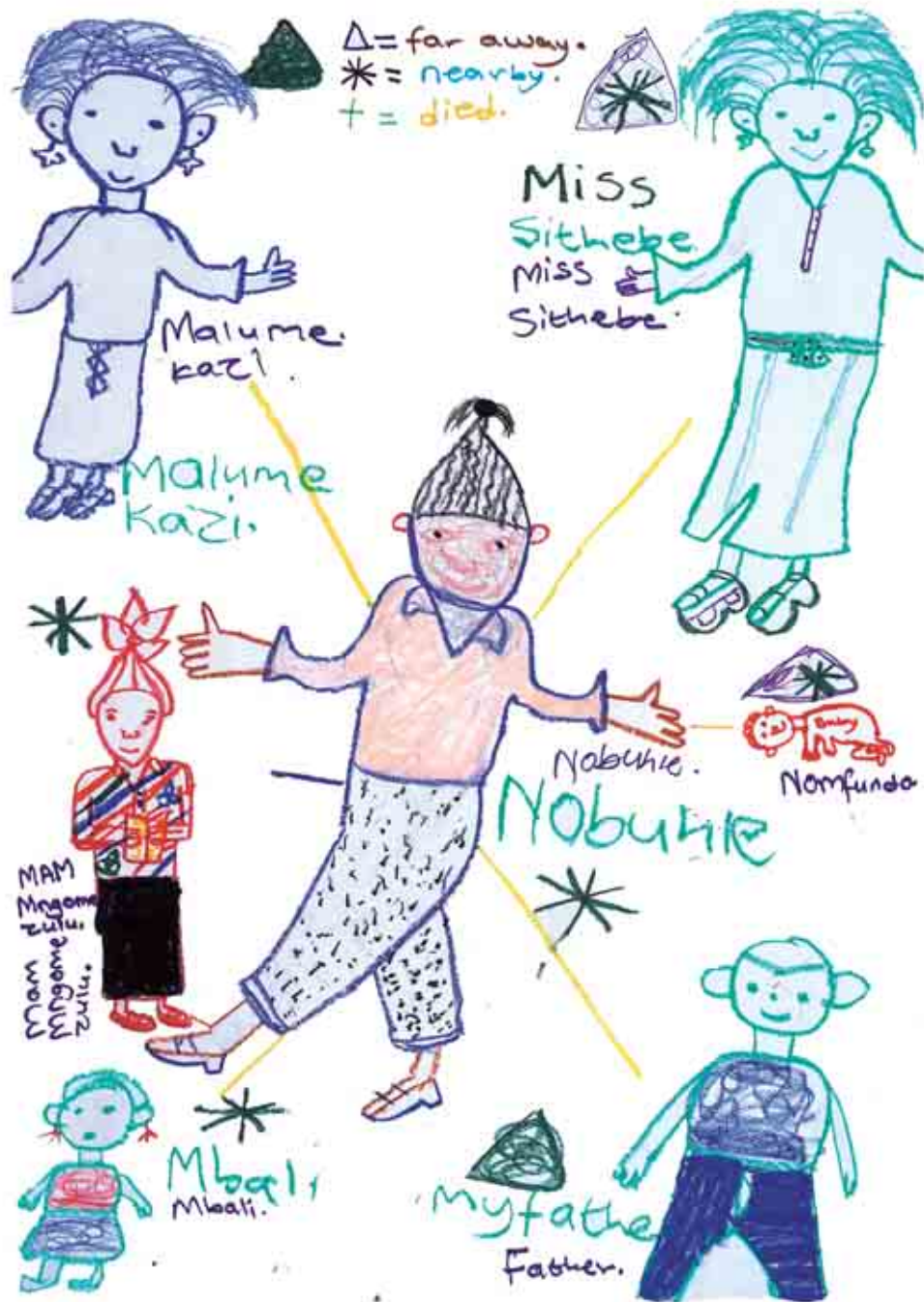
It is this morning. We were learning and we have eaten nicely (others laugh). (B prim, Swaziland)

Children appreciated having someone who talked and listened to them.

## Party

The last time I was happy was in a party at my aunt's place. It was my brother-in-law's party. I just liked the fun and the food and music. G (B prim, Swaziland)

What made me happy was the birth of my sister and my birthday. (G sec, Botswana)



# 8. How does Circles of Support help the children

Circles of Support as has been mentioned earlier works closely with the schools and communities. They help the people to mobilise local resources for the vulnerable children. They train the people in Children's rights and needs. This means that there is a high awareness around these children and their needs.

In almost all the communities and schools no one mentioned the name Circles of Support when they talked about the help that they get. The children in schools referred to specific individuals that they went to when they need help and all these individuals turned out to be the members of the Circles of Support. This is a powerful aspect of the Circles of Support as it means children who get help from Circles of Support are most unlikely to be labelled. As we know labelling and stigma contribute towards discouraging children from seeking help.

In Swaziland children mentioned going to the secretary and two lady teachers for the following needs:

## Food for break at school

Later I go to the secretary because we have been told to go to the secretary when we need something. I go to her when I do not have money for food. If there is money she gives you if there isn't there isn't.

When I get to school I go to the secretary where I get money for food, if there is no money I do not eat sometimes for the whole day.  
(G sec., Swaziland)

## Transport

When I get to school I go to Miss Muntu or Mrs Pemba and she gives me money for bus fare and money for food. (G sec., Swaziland)

My problem is school money and transport money to school. Sometimes I come to the secretary and the secretary would tell me there is no money. Then I wouldn't know what to do. B

## School fees

I went directly to the secretary and Mrs Pemba and I told them that the money I have is not enough. I told them I have R300. The secretary understood me, she sympathised and she said I must bring the money and that what is left I'll pay it bit by bit. This forced me to continue working and I paid in R50 bits until it was all paid out. This year my sponsor has paid R1000 and the rest of it the secretary does something about it (vyandibonelela). B

Children in the Primary school in Swaziland later went on to talk about the help that they get from school.

*Yes. We eat here at school. (B prim, Swaziland)*

If there is something that I need or when it is related to school if they can't help me I come to school to ask for help. (G prim, Swaziland)

*I like it here in school. It is nice here at school. I get help from other children in the school and from teachers. When I do not have a pen or instruments they borrow me. Teachers help me when there is something that I do not understand. (G prim, Swaziland)*

Yes. When I do not have money for transport I ask from Miss Mdzebele and she gives me. (G prim, Swaziland)

In Botswana all the children talked about going to the Social worker. A number of teachers were mentioned as people that children could easily talk to about their problems.

## Shoes and school uniform

### Social worker

*I sometimes go to the social worker to ask for school uniform. Yes she did give me a uniform. Food I also get. (G prim, Botswana)*

Social workers are important as they can provide you with the things you don't have like clothes, food and they can help you solve your problems. (G sec, Botswana)

*I sometimes go to the council offices to see social workers. To tell them about my problems at home like when we are in short of something. (B sec, Botswana)*

I go to see the social workers like when I need clothes and they normally provide me with them. (G sec, Botswana)

*I can go to the social workers or BDFWA offices where they offer counselling. (G sec, Botswana)*

I have never gone to any place but am intending to go and see the social worker. My brother is not taking care of us even though he is working. (B sec, Botswana)

Some people can easily look at the things that children receive as hand outs and not necessarily as things that builds towards their self esteem. We have also seen how these can restore children's faith in humanity. At how the children appreciate the help they get and how as the result of this help they continue to believe in their abilities to pass, to perform and to progress in school.

There is also a lot of evidence from what the children say about how receiving gifts bring happiness and being the highlight of their lives. The quotes above have also shown that children have fought to stay in schools, they have continued to see the school as their hope for better lives. They continue to be determined in spite of all the challenges and the little help that they get.

# 9. General Observations about the Circles of Support

## 9.1 Findings

### Hand outs have a potential as an intervention

There is a perception that giving out help/handing out packages ie. handouts as they are called creates dependency. This has not been the case regarding Circles of Support. The help that children have received has gone a long way in keeping the children in school. It has sustained their efforts in their fight against poverty to stay in school. Here is what they said about the money they get for different things:

*Sometimes I do not have break money. I was fortunate because the secretary told me to come on Mondays to check if there is money. If there is she'll give me and if there isn't there won't be money. B*

*Yes. When I do not have money for transport I ask from Miss Mdzebele and she gives me. (G prim, Swaziland)*

*This year my sponsor has paid R1000 and the rest of it the secretary does something about it (uyandibonelela). B*

*I sometimes go to the social worker to ask for school uniform. Yes she did give me a uniform. Food I also get. (g prim, Botswana)*

### Guidance and Support help

One strong element that may have encouraged children to be independent in the Circles of Support groups is the accessibility of the teachers and the guidance and support that children seem to be getting from them and each other in the Circles of Support.

*My guidance and counselling teacher is important because when I have problems I can go to her for guidance. (B sec, Botswana)*

### Children are supported in their initiatives

Children are supported in the initiatives that they already undertake to survive at home. They are given space to explore their alternatives. An example of this is the story of Themba, a boy who had to work in the gardens to top up his fees after getting a half bursary.

I went directly to the secretary and Mrs Tshabalala and I told them that the money I have is not enough. I told them I have R300. The secretary understood me, she sympathised and she said I must bring the money and that what is left I'll pay bit by bit. The following year the secretary & Mrs Tshabalala paid the difference on my fees.

### Children participate in initiatives

One girl was involved in similar programmes like the Circles of Support that are initiated by the Department of Education in one country to help the children both in school and in the community. She is also a member of the Circles of Support. When asked what do they do in the other groups she said:

The groups are really similar. The only difference is that the other one helps children who are in the school only and the other one helps everybody even those in the community. We grow crops and we sell them. With the money we buy little groceries that some children may need.

In School we find out if there is anything that we can help you with. Say you stay with gogo (grandmother) and you have a lot of things to do and as a result you are not able to clean or do other things like laundry, we offer to do those things. (G sec, Swaziland)

This is a powerful model as it is easy to see that these children are not only recipients of help. They do something for themselves and they also help others. They are part of a solution to their challenges. This involvement in their lives and community goes a long way in building their own resilience and in a way that they see themselves.

### Schools protect children

Schools can be positive and supportive experience for children in need.

Children in school felt protected and cared for. They had specific people they went to for different needs. Help was central in the school, in the secretary's office.

### Awareness of resources

Children who benefited from Circles of Support were aware of how funds that helped them were raised. The teachers went around the school with a tin and asked for donations from the children in classes. On Fridays children who want to would wear casual clothes and pay a standard amount for this. It is possible that it is this awareness that has made children to appreciate the help and to understand why there was not always money for food and transport when they needed it. The beauty of this is that the children who benefit can also contribute when they have money. This help is structured in a way that does not marginalize them.

## 9.2 Recommendations

- Strategic partnerships like in the case of Botswana where social workers are co opted in the Circles of Support are needed. In Botswana there is a Short Term Plan of Action where children can access government help only through the social workers. (CAN YOU PLEASE CHECK THE FACTS) It is needless to say how valuable this relationship with the social workers is for a group like Circles of Support in this context.
- There is a strong need to identify more resources for Circles of Support to enable it to sustain its positive impacts on the lives of children. Closer attention however needs to be given to girl children and their need to feel secure enough to help themselves in their communities.
- Closer attention needs to be given to girl children and their need to feel secure enough to help themselves in their communities. In almost all the older groups that we ran, boys mentioned doing odd jobs in order to supplement the help they were getting. This did not seem to be the case with girls.
- Participation and involvement of children needs to be vigorously encouraged and strengthened. We have seen through their life stories their ability and potential to change their lives and those of others.
- It has been shown from what children say that they remain vulnerable in their homes. They are discriminated against, they are not listened to, they are made to work hard and sometimes they do not get enough time to study. All these challenges would not go away no matter how much material support the children get. This means that they will still remain vulnerable and still on the risk of falling through the gaps. This raises a huge concern and a challenge for the roles and the importance of community networks.
- A strong recommendation would also be to involve families that have adopted or absorbed the children who are vulnerable. They, like the children should be made part of the solution.
- There is a strong need for someone to take an interest in the children's achievements. These achievements need to be acknowledged and these children need to be respected. Much of the help that these children receive comes in the form of material objects, while guidance and emotional support is lacking. Someone to guide and support would go a long way in building resilience in these children. As one group correctly pointed out these children need close supervision from teachers and guidance in simple tasks like time management to meet the many challenges they face.



# 10. Conclusion

It seems that to many children the school is the only thing and place that makes sense in their lives. It anchors them, it gives them purpose, it gives them security, it is associated to their survival, it affirms their belief in themselves, it might also be the only place where they feel like they are like other children. Their friends are there, they see the school as the only place that can solve their problems or help them forget them. The school is closely linked to their better future. They see it as a key to better things in life. This is illustrated below by what children say:

*I like school because it's where I get my education. (G sec, Botswana)*

*To learn about future life. (G sec, Botswana)*

*To learn about life and have knowledge. (G sec, Botswana)*

*I like school because it prepares us to be able to take care of ourselves in life. (G sec, Botswana)*

*I like school because I will have a better future. (G sec, Botswana)*

*I like school because in future I will have everything I want. (G sec, Botswana)*

Other children talked about being happy at school

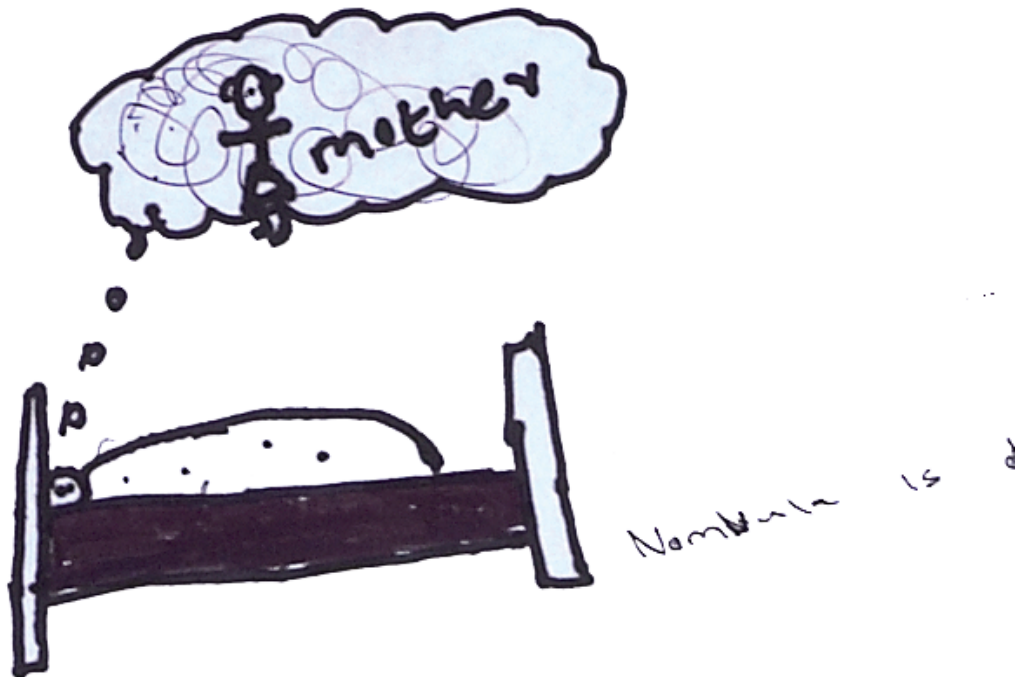
*I feel happy and enjoy being at school when I have what I need. When I need something I am not able to concentrate. B*

*After my father left, my mother changed. My performance at school dropped a great deal. I had started working at home in the morning. I was not able to attend to my books well. This year first term I was position 10. I stayed and continued. You know what has surprised me is that I enjoy being here at school than at home. I think I am trying to forget about home when I am with my books. I am still there at home. When it gets worse I will leave. (G sec, Swaziland)*

*I did not have money to pay for school fees. When the school closed they withheld my report. I went to negotiate. One day I stayed at home, thinking what can I do? At home I had a problem and I would think about school. I decided staying at home was not an option for me. (B sec, Swaziland)*

The implications for the school are very intense given what the children say. Many people know and are aware of the children's perception of school in the context of their poverty. People are also aware of the great need for teachers to concentrate on their primary responsibility of teaching the children. People are aware of the many roles that most teachers (in most cases without support from relevant authorities) have taken on as a result of the adversities that their learners face. Children on the other hand cannot think beyond the school when they come up with solutions. This is not surprising as children in most communities that are struggling are not exposed to any other forms of interventions. The school in most communities is seen as the only visible official institution/authority that children know. It holds power in the children's eyes. It is the only place that they spend most time of their lives when they grow up.

The strong recommendation would be to locate projects such as Circles of Support in schools as it has proved in this case how central their role is to children. A particular success of Circles of Support is that helping the children/intervention has not been left to teachers as another add on. There are people who work closely with the teachers and this probably make teachers stronger in their interventions knowing that they have community support. Teachers who are involved act as members of both the community and the school. This awareness of children's issues and challenges amongst certain teachers has created a strong safe net for children as you can see from some of their comments. Community members seem to have a sense of ownership and feel responsible for the vulnerable children in their communities. This can be seen by a number of community members that are seen around these schools.



# Solutions: How can Schools help?

The school have to look after the work while at school and provide them money for transport

If any community member owns a workshop like woodwork, he must give Lakhe a opportunity to work there so that he can get a pocket, thus he help his family with money from piece jobs.

Teachers must understand if he happens to be absent at school not to punish him, b/c we reflect different decisions, like leave school.

The school must give advices them about their life at home and school

## Annexure A

# Case Study

I stay with my father, a stepmother. There are many children at home, they do not go to school. I am the only one who goes to school. Part of the reason we are not all at school is because father took another wife and no one cared that much whether we go to school or not. Amongst my brothers and sisters there are those who are older than me and others who come after me.

I stayed at home because there was no money for school. Although babe (father) tried he was not able to help me. We would go to ask for money for school and he would say he does not have. That's how others gave up on school. So I thought of myself and my future. I realised I will be the one who is struggling in future then I decided not to give up.

I tried and I asked people to help me to pay for my school fees. I was thirteen years by then. I did not know anything about school. Because I was determined I used to look at the books of those who went to school, my friends. I would ask them how do you do this, and I got to be able to write, read a few things even though I hadn't gone to school.

After sometime I asked another man to take me to school. I started at crèche. The teacher there was teaching me basics in preparation for grade 1. I went through grade 1, 2,3 and 4 I stopped because this man couldn't go on anymore. This man tried and went to my father to try to say to him that they should put together the money to take me to school. They did not agree and this man stopped and I suffered. I stayed for another two years out of school. But by this time I was doing a lot like planting people's gardens, growing crops, selling and some would ask me (ukubalimela) as I have shown in my picture. I got another man who took me to Siteki (his rural home). He said the problem was that his house was still incomplete. He wanted someone to take care of it. He said if I go he would put me through Primary. I decide to go because I wanted to go to school. I stayed there until I passed Std 5 and I got first position. Then I came back home. The situation was still the same. There was now an added problem, they said that I think I am better because I am better than the others because I have gone to school. I did not have a problem with that. I used to talk to people for advice. I knew that every person is on their own, each one fend for himself but that God fend for us all.

I knew that as much as I am old there was something that I can do for myself. So when I came back here I tried looking for school money and I realised that there isn't such money. I used to work at Siteki where I used to stay. I bought myself things like radio, a bicycle and few things that can show I was working. So when I came here, and there was no money for school, it was necessary for me to sell these treasured things of mine, even some clothes. This money was not enough for form one. So I asked another man and he gave me and I paid at school. Now my problem was I am staying alone in the house, my problem was food and I had to solve it.

## Annexure B

# Circles of Support Instrument

The instrument was slightly adapted for use by the different age groups

Activity	Rationale
<p><b>Activity 1: Daily Activities</b></p> <p>Think about your life. About your family? Who stays with you in the house? What do you do daily? On top of your paper draw all the people who stay in your house.</p> <p>After this, divide the paper that you are given into blocks. In the first block draw yourself when you wake up in the morning. In the last block when you go to sleep in the night. In the space in between draw all the things that you do in your day.</p> <p><b>Questions:</b></p> <p>Tell us about your day?</p> <p>What time do you wake up? What do you do in the morning? Who does what in the morning?</p> <p><b>During the week</b></p> <p>Do you go to school? What do you like about school? What don't you like about school?</p> <p>For each activity ask: Is there someone who helps you with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting food in the morning? If he is not there who does?</li> <li>• Who cooks? Fetches water?</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>What are the most difficult times in your day? Indicate this by a zig zag line down the relevant block. Use a different coloured koki for this.</p> <p>What's the most difficult time of your day?</p> <p>What happens during this time?</p>	<p>This is a non - threatening activity that is easy to start with and that children easily participate in.</p> <p>Most of the things the children say will be the same.</p> <p>This activity gives details of a typical day in the children's lives.</p>

**On weekends**

What do you do on Saturdays?

What do you like about Saturdays?

What about Sundays?

What do you like about Sundays?

*Fac: Ask for more detail that arises from the picture.*

*If the child is not in school ask relevant questions to what he/she does.*

**Activity 2: Social Networks**

Think of your community. Draw your home in the community.

Think of the places and people that you think are important in your community. Draw them on the map.

Think of the places and people that you go to in your community. Draw them on the map. These places can be where people that you go to live, they can also be offices of organisations that help people.

Then:

Tell us about your picture.

What are important places in your community? Do you sometimes go to these places? Why do you go to these places?

Who are the important people? How do they help others? What kind of work do they do? Are they people you can approach for help?

Where do you normally go in your community? Why do you go there?

Who do you go to in your community?

Why do you go to this person? What kind of a person is she/he?

- If you have a problem with getting books or school things who do you go to? Why?
- If you are hungry? Why?
- When you are sad? Why?

Are there any organisations that you go to?

What do they do there?

How does this help you?

This activity will give a sense of community that the children come from and the support and the resources that exist and how the child views these places and people and the relationships.

You can also use this activity to understand the circles of support that already exist in the child's mind, who is there for them and how they feel about that person.

**What about weekends? Where do you go?**

Which places do you like going to best?

Tell me about this place. What happens there?

Which places do you like least?

Tell me about this place. What is it you don't like?

**Activity 3: Different Faces**

Hold up the different faces.

You can ask the children what the faces mean as the children may recognise them and ask them to tell you about the faces.

Tell the children what emotion each face represents eg. this is a sad face, a happy face, worried, crying face. Then under each face probe:

Ask of issues at specific places like at home, at school or in the community when you probe.

**Sad Face**

When was the last you felt like this?

What had happened? For example my mother fell sick

What happened as a result of this event?  
For example I moved to stay with my grandmother in the farm.

**Happy face**

When was the last you felt like this?

What had happened?

What happened as a result of this event?

Worried/Thinking (bubbles outside the face)

When was the last you felt like this?

What had happened?

What happened as a result of this event?

**Crying Face**

When was the last you felt like this?

What had happened?

What happened as a result of this event?

This activity will give a sense of events in the child's life that may have affected her.

Impact of these changes on the child can also come up.

### Activity 4: Typical Boy/Girl

This activity will be done in the third person. Give the child on the picture a name that is relevant to the context.

NB. Remember to use a name that is relevant to the children.

#### Story

Zakhe is 13 yrs old and he lives with his mother, an elder sister and two younger brothers. His mother does not work and his father works in xxxxxx a bigger town where he stays. He only comes home once in a while or if he has managed to get a temporary job. He does not have a permanent job since he was retrenched in his previous job. He Zakhe is in grade 8 and his sister is in grade 11. Most of the time he feels bad at school because of all the challenges they have to deal with at school.

Fortunately for Zakhe someone at school realised that there are many children like him and his brothers and sister.

#### Probe:

What challenges do you think Zakhe faced

- At home?
- In the community?
- At school?
- Do you know any children who are like Zakhe?

Why does he worry about his family and his father?

How do you think Zakhe overcomes these challenges?

Who helps him?

How do you think children like Zakhe can be helped?

#### At school

How can/does the school help him?

- The principal?
- Teachers?
- Other learners?
- Visitors to the school?

Who else helps him?

Where does this person come from?

In this activity we use a picture to create a concrete thing that the younger children can relate to. The picture should be of a normal child, not a model child or a very poor child.

*It would be nice to start looking for these pictures (a boy and a girl) so that the same pictures are used everywhere.*

*What you need:*

*A picture of a boy or girl.*

*Read the story in the activity section.*

**Activity 5: Solutions – Children should work in a group for this activity.**

A colourful mural/big picture on a big piece of paper

Remind the children of all the challenges that they have talked about in the workshop including the ones that Zakhe faces in activity 4.

Then say:

Think of all the different things that can help children with all the challenges that we have talked about. This can be a place, a certain way of doing things or it could be the community. Draw what you've thought about on that big piece of paper.

After the drawing discuss it.

This is a nice activity to round up with. Children come up with solutions to the challenges that they have thought about. The whole purpose of this activity is to give them as much space as they can to dream. We do not want only practical solutions but anything that comes to their minds. The facilitator must emphasize this.

You can take the photograph of the mural for the report but you'll still need to keep it, as it is one big piece of paper. Ask the children to let you keep it.