



Circles of Support Project

School Case Studies

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Introduction

Case studies were prepared of four Circles of Support Schools. The compilation of case studies was made possible through the use of the completed forms in:

- ◆ the COS diary,
- ◆ the Fieldworker Diary,
- ◆ the Quarterly Reports per country,
- ◆ the schools capacity audit,
- ◆ the Circles of Support Report on Project Training Activities and Findings of Training Evaluations, and
- ◆ additional sources of information about the countries geography and demography.

Incomplete forms did hamper the preparation of case studies. Therefore information is not uniform across all schools. Forms were collected during the period November 2004 — June 2005. This period includes COS inception phase activities, the local consultation and training phase and the first six months of implementation of COS activities in schools.

The case studies are not a comprehensive review of COS activities but provide an insight into the school environment, the challenges and successes of the COS project. The case studies reflect schools in rural, semi-rural and semi-urban environments. They also include primary and combined schools. The smallest school has 231 students and the largest 603 students. The names of the schools are not included so that the identity and stories of children supported by COS remain anonymous.

Circles of Support school case studies:

Rural primary school Botswana	230 students
Semi-urban primary school Namibia	491 students
Rural combined school Namibia	603 students
Semi-rural high school Swaziland	342 students

Case study 1: Rural Primary School Botswana

Location

- ◆ rural
- ◆ situated in Draaihoek in the Kgalagadi southern district
- ◆ 90km north east from the capital city of the district, Tshabong

School audit

This is a fairly typical primary school in the Kgalagadi District. There are 230 pupils enrolled in this school, with roughly equivalent numbers of boys and girls. Most children walk to school, arriving at 7am and leaving at 1pm. Another schooling session is held in the afternoon for a different set of pupils, ending at 5pm. There are no extra mural activities for pupils at the school.

Whilst education is free in Botswana, many schools charge nominal levies; levies at this school were equivalent to around BWP22.¹

The school maintains daily attendance registers and registers of children who drop out of school. The quality and completeness of these records was not assessed. The school also maintains records of children who are orphaned and children who are in need. These records are sent to the guidance teacher and an annual summary is sent to the HIV/AIDS committee at the District Office. Mechanisms for follow up were unclear.

The capacity audit conducted at the school showed that there was no existing policy for OVC at the school, and no consensus regarding what the school's role should be in supporting these children. Although a few ad hoc activities were in place, there was no particular synergy between these.

The school has general HIV/AIDS education materials available for pupils and an HIV and AIDS trained teacher, but no material on how to assist needy or vulnerable children. A Guidance and Counselling Committee is in existence. There is HIV/AIDS education in school, but no HIV/AIDS budget for further activities. There is a newly constituted HIV/AIDS committee which now includes community members (previously teachers only). There is a school feeding scheme which is active.

There is a school governing body which is active within the school, but not connected to stakeholders outside the school. The school reported minimal community-school interactions. The school belongs to a cluster of schools and the cluster is reportedly active.

The Circles of Support Group

The Botswana case study is the only case study where the head of the school is one of the three school convenors that form part of the school Circles of Support group. (Namibia and Swaziland have two or three school convenors consisting of teachers only.) Three neighbourhood agents from the community were trained as part of the Circles of Support group. Concerning the selection of neighbourhood agents, the schools were at liberty to use any criteria, but in most cases agents were chosen that had a good track record for volunteering their services, especially with orphans. One of the agents is the village headman.

¹ School Capacity Audit, Botswana

The group reported that only one organisation was available to them in terms of help and support, this being the local Social and Community Development Office.

The Circles of Support group was set up in October/November 2004.² Only one of the members trained had left the project during the six month follow-up, because of a job transfer to another area — and was reportedly starting another Circles of Support group in her new community.

Activities of the Circles of Support Group

Most group members interviewed in May 2005 indicated that their role was primarily an identification and referral one, as well as providing counselling and support. A group member reported identifying a child who was raped by her uncle and then supported by the COS group to move in with her aunts. The case was also taken to the police.³ The COS group plays an advocacy role for children's rights among parents and guardians. One of their intentions is to organise a workshop for OVC and caregivers to share their experiences.

One COS group member comments on his improved relationship with children supported by the project:

Direct material support and specific educational support is not reported by group members.

"There are some kids whom I thought were introvert but after becoming closer to me I realised that they could express their feelings well and became open to their peers."

- Male Circles of Support member



Households visited by the Circles of Support

Circles of Support visited seventeen households in the community. These households contained fifty school-age children altogether. Of those, 4 out of the 50 children were not enrolled in school at all.

The number of children per household visited ranged from two to seven children. All households visited were traditional mud housing. One of the households was regarded as a child-headed household, since the mother spent most of her time working at the cattle post. Most others were single-parent households. Similar issues were discussed at all the initial household visits — these included survival issues, health and schooling. Other needs noted were for clothing for children, improved accommodation and water — many households had to travel long distances to fetch water — a task often delegated to female children.

Extract from Household Visit Monitoring Form

"There are 6 children living here, 1 under 6 years, three children who are 7-12 years old. Only two of these are in school. There are two 13-18 year olds, only 1 of whom is in school. It is a single-parent household. There are two mud houses... yard is not fenced. House has windows which are broken. No furniture in the house. A few utensils scattered about. Home environment not conducive to pupils."

- COS group member



² SADC Circles of Support Report on Training Activities and Findings of Training Evaluations, May 2005

³ Circles of Support Fieldworkers Progress Report, First quarter 2005

Impact of Circles of Support on Children's Lives

Positive changes in children's quality of life have been reported from group members in this area. These include improved emotional well-being, and in at least two cases, Circles of Support was instrumental in removing a child from an abusive living situation, to a more appropriate situation. The first case involved the earlier example of the raped child who was removed from the care of the rapist. The second case is described below.

Story of a child that Circles of Support has helped

"Female 14 years old, Std 6. Orphan. Her studies were dropping and we asked her what was worrying her. She told me that her aunts were abusing her, denying her food, clothes from the social workers. The child wanted to be moved to a different aunt with her other sibling. We managed relocate the child and her younger sister with the Social Worker, and she has improved her performance."

- Female COS member



Case study 2: Semi-urban Primary School Namibia

Location

- ◆ semi-urban
- ◆ situated in the Oshana Region
- ◆ situated north of Oshakati

School Audit

There are 491 students enrolled in this institution. Students arrive at 7:15am and leave at 13:20 pm. Teachers arrive at 7:00 am and leave at 13:45 pm. The school fees are NAD60 and there is no school levy.

This Primary School has a telephone line and most teachers have a cell phone. The main source of water in this area is tap water. In spite of the school being close to the main road, the school does not have transport and pupils walk to get there.

It is 2km away from the nearest school and it interacts with other schools in the area by sharing activities such as sports, maths and science contests. It also belongs to a school cluster but this seems to experience difficulties due to lack of resources. It interacts with the community more often than other schools in the area and usually meets with the community at least three times in a year.

In terms of programmes for students, the school does not provide stationery or food for vulnerable children, and the fee exemption programme had not been approved as of June 2005. Nevertheless, teachers voluntarily counsel and provide food to vulnerable children. The institution does not have a food garden programme although there is a local feeding scheme supported by organisations such as VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas).

The school has an AIDS club that focuses on the message: "Your future is your decision". The club uses posters to inform pupils and teachers. The school does not have an HIV/AIDS co-ordinator or an HIV/AIDS trained teacher. In general terms, the education on the topic of HIV/AIDS is basic and the school does not have an HIV/AIDS budget.

The school keeps records of those children who drop out of school, orphans and students attendance. These are summarised every three months.

A local mapping exercise depicts the school's closest facilities, which are the state hospital, two shopping centres, a bank and a youth centre. The latter is part of a programme promoted by the Namibian Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation (MHETEC). These centres will specifically target rural young people with programmes in agriculture.⁴ The project is working to develop a community-based programme which will provide training, education and income-generating opportunities to out-of-school youth from the ages of 15 to 30. This represents a significant resource for the Circles of Support group.

The Circles of Support Group

In addition to the two school convenors, three village agents participated in the Circles of Support training.⁵ The individuals were selected according to the following criteria:

- ◆ Ability to read and write
- ◆ Personal commitment to address the needs of orphans and vulnerable children
- ◆ Leadership qualities
- ◆ Geographical representation of the school surroundings
- ◆ Ability to work with limited supervision and limited incentives.

The Circles of Support Group was established in October/November 2004, and none of the members have been reported to have left the project as of June 2005. There are three females and two males in this group.

Activities of the Circles of Support Group

This group has mobilised resources to help orphans and vulnerable children. For instance, it helped the school to get a private clinical psychologist to counsel pupils. The group also arranged vulnerable children's access to food through organisations and it helped an HIV positive orphan to find a home and get access to ARV treatment.

One of the challenges for the group is the delayed response of organisations in providing material help. The group has applied for food and clothes from local organisation but has not received a response.

A school convenor comments that one of the things the project needs is to:

"Sensitise the private sector about their social responsibilities, and ensure NGOs and donors are forthcoming and material support."

- Female Circles of Support school convenor



⁴ Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations 2002, *Rural Youth: Stories from the Regions*

⁵ SADC Circles of Support Report on Training Activities and Findings of Training Evaluations, May 2005

However, one of the major challenges faced by this group is around the community's attitudes towards the Circles of Support group's work. It seems that community members in the local village are reluctant to share their personal problems with village agents and school convenors. According to a fieldworker ⁶, some parents do not co-operate with the agents claiming that they do not have the project's identification. A member of the Circles of Support group tells the story of a child whose mother did not want to accept the group's help:

"An eleven years old girls whose parents work... the mother was an alcoholic and the father never sent money home... We talked to the mother but she was not cooperating. She did not want people to talk about her household problems... Currently it seems the mother makes provision to set food on the table, but not willing to discuss this with the COS group members."

- Male Circles of Support member



However, despite the challenges posed by the community members, the Circles of Support group has managed to find a home for an orphan, and provide food to some children. The group has also followed up on those households that have been helped by local organisations. A case in point is that of a child that received support from TKMOAMS (local NGO) to pay his school fees but whose mother spent the money on something else. The group followed up on this case, and made sure that the mother paid the school fees at the end.⁷

Households visited by Circles of Support

Most of the households were visited by two school convenors and one village agent. The information available for 28 households indicated that these contained 69 school-age children altogether. Of those, 29 out of the 69 were not enrolled in school at all. Of those enrolled, 11 out of 40 seemed to not attend school regularly.

The number of children per household visited ranged from one child to eleven children. Two of these households were regarded as child-headed households. Most of the others were headed by the children's grandmother or by a single parent or relative. Most of the heads of the households are unemployed, or in some cases only one parent works but does not support the household. Some of the parents sell items in the local market.

The issues discussed at all the initial household visits included survival issues, health and schooling.

Example of Type of Household Supported: Extract from Household Visit Monitoring Form

"There are 5 children in this household. 4 of them are 0-6 years old and 1 is 7-12 years old... Padelia's mother doesn't work and her father works but not support the child. Only depend on the grandmother... When she cannot afford, the child leaves school because of school fee. Exemption of school fee needed here."

- Female COS group member



⁶ Quarterly Report 15 March - 08 June 2005
⁷ Quarterly Report 15 March - 08 June 2005

Impact of Circles of Support on Children's Lives

In spite of the difficulties experienced by group members to gain the confidence and trust of the community, there have been many positive changes regarding the children's well-being. The most successful experience concerns an orphan who successfully went back to school. Her story is as follows:

Story of a child that Circles of Support has helped

"We had a 9 years old girl whose parents died of HIV/AIDS complications. The child was also HIV positive. The grandma lived in a rural area far from health facilities. COS group managed to locate relatives in Oshakati... We arranged with health authorities to enrol the child on ARV and provide counselling to the child through a private counsellor. The child is back in school and her health was improving. The Circles of Support group continue to monitor the health of the child and her attendance and performance in school."

- School convenor & village agent



Case study 3: Rural Combined School Namibia

Location

- ◆ rural
- ◆ situated in the Oshana region near Ondangwa

School Audit

There are 600 students enrolled in this institution. Students arrive at 7:45 am and leave at 13:50 pm. Teachers arrive at 7:30 am and leave at 2:30 pm. The primary school fees are NAD15 and secondary NAD35.

This combined school has precarious communications. There is no telephone line and although there is a cell phone available, the network is often out of range. There is no school transport, a problem shared by most schools in the area. However, teachers and parents often provide transport on special occasions.

Despite being rural, the school is not isolated from other institutions. It is 3km away from the nearest school, and interacts with other schools in the area by sharing activities such as sports and organising HIV/AIDS workshops. Promoting these activities is important because according to the school's principal "these arouse the children's interests" although he points out that the budget allocated for them is very limited.

In terms of programmes for students, the school provides stationery for needy children, as well as providing a fee exemption. The school does not have a feeding scheme. There is a school governing body. The interactions between school and community are minimal but the school is involved in some community work.

Regarding HIV/AIDS, the school supplies education materials for children and teachers such as "Let's talk about AIDS", "Choose life", AIDS AFR 2010 and Life Skills manuals and posters. There is an HIV/AIDS co-ordinator, but no Guidance and Counselling Committee. The school does not have an HIV/AIDS budget.

It is difficult for the school to track all vulnerable children because it only keeps records of those who drop out of school, and orphans.

A local mapping exercise shows the school students are drawn from different villages surrounding the school.

The Circles of Support Group

As part of the Circles of Support programme, three school convenors were trained. In addition to the three school convenors, the Circles of Support group is also made up of three village agents. Like the other Namibian case study they were selected according to their:

- ◆ Ability to read and write
- ◆ Personal commitment to address the needs of orphans and vulnerable children
- ◆ Leadership qualities
- ◆ Geographical representation of the school surroundings
- ◆ Ability to work with limited supervision and limited incentives.

The group was established in October/November 2004, and since then one of the members seems to have left the project in February 2005. One of the village agents is the village headman.

Activities of the Circles of Support Group

The COS group first identifies orphans and vulnerable children and then makes a list that prioritises those who urgently need the group's help. The group has identified 92 vulnerable and orphan children as of June 2005.⁸

The group tackles problems that can be addressed through talking with the children's parents/ caregivers and addresses problems that concern material needs such as food, clothing and school fees. In finding solutions to the latter, the group members have focused on approaching organisations that might support children. However, these attempts have not always been successful.

For instance, they asked Catholic AIDS Action (CAA) to take care of two children with no success. They have also asked the Oshana Regional Councillor to provide food and help for orphans but according to the school convenors:

"We made application for food for needy households with OVC enrolled in our school but we still awaiting for the Regional Councillor to respond."

- Female Circles of Support school convenors



Nonetheless, the school convenors managed to get 45 blankets from the councillor for children on their list and are planning to ask for uniforms, body lotions and old clothes from community members.

⁸ Quarterly Report 15 March - 08 June 2005

Despite the general lack of material support, this group has managed to provide counselling to vulnerable children and it has followed up two children that were not attending school regularly and had no home. As a result of the intervention by the Circles of Support group, these children's situations are more stable and both of them are attending school regularly. The group is also working hard to make sure that teachers observe any changed behaviour of the pupils and remind them of the activities promoted by the group.

Households visited by Circles of Support

The information available for 29 households indicated that these contained 92 school-age children altogether, of whom 2 out of 92 were not enrolled in school at all. Of those enrolled 6 out of 90 were identified as not attending school regularly.

The number of children per household visited ranged from three to nine children. None of these households were regarded as a child-headed household. Most of them are single-parent households or headed by an elder which in most cases is the children's grandmother. The issues discussed at all the initial visits included survival issues, health and schooling.

Example of Type of Household Supported:

Extract from Household Visit Monitoring Form

"She said there are 9 children living with her. She is very old. These kids stay with grandma. 5 children are under 6 years, 2 who are 7-12 years old and other 2 who are 13-18 years old. 4 of the 9 children are enrolled in school and 2 of them are under 6 years. There is no food, no school uniform or clothes to wear. Small children in this house are naked, no dress or shorts. They need our support as soon as possible."

- School convenor



Impact of Circles of Support on Children's Lives

Some children in the area have benefited from the intervention of the Circles of Support group. Most of the positive changes include the children's emotional well-being.

Story of a child that Circles of Support has helped

"Male. 14 years old. Orphan... After the death of his parents lived with the grandmother and started attending school intermittently. He later left home as was sleeping here and there. The COS group tried to talk to the child and he is now back in school and attending school regularly"

- Female village agent



Case study 4: Semi-rural High School Swaziland

Location

- ◆ semi-rural
- ◆ situated in the Hhohho district, in the north-east part of Swaziland
- ◆ 20km north-east of Mbabane, the administrative capital city of the Kingdom of Swaziland
- ◆ shares a site with a primary school of the same name

School Audit

There are 342 students enrolled in this institution. Students arrive at 7:30am and leave at 15:30 pm. Teachers arrive at 7:40 am and leave at 15:30 pm. The annual school fees are SZL459.20 and the school has an annual levy of SZL574.

The school has access to water and sanitation services, and has a telephone line. There is no school transport.

The school shares a site with a primary school of the same name. However, it is 10km away from the nearest high school. There is no interaction between the two schools. The school does not interact with any other schools for social activities and programmes. It also does not report meetings with the community.

The school provides stationery for vulnerable children and food for all children attending school. Vulnerable and orphaned children are not immediately or automatically exempt from paying fees. The school does not have an after hours feeding scheme.

The school's head teacher points out that having more class rooms would make a difference to the school environment since the institution is currently overcrowded.

The school has an AIDS club but it does not supply HIV/AIDS education material for pupils or teachers. There is an HIV/AIDS co-ordinator and an HIV/AIDS trained teacher, but the school does not have an HIV/AIDS budget.

The records kept by the school accounts are for those who drop out of school, as well as of students' attendance. The school reports that it has records of orphans and vulnerable children.

A local mapping exercise reported that the school has access to roads and transport and is close to health facilities, a police station and a phone shop. The school is surrounded by 4 villages and children walk to school.

The Circles of Support Group

Two teachers from the school were trained as school convenors as part of the Circles of Support group. The Circles of Support Group was set up in July — November 2004. During the local consultation and training phase of the COS pilot project it was agreed to introduce the primary school located on the same site to the COS project and one COS group was established to cover both schools. The COS group members support children of different ages and interact with both schools. Seven village agents and two school convenors belong to this enlarged group. None of the members have left the project as of June 2005. The group is made up of six females and three males.

Activities of the Circles of Support Group

This group focuses on two activities, these are household visits and counselling.

The group had identified 25 vulnerable children as of June 2005 but the school convenors' lack of time to visit households in the community is challenging for project.

In addition, not residing in the community affects the teachers' knowledge of local challenges. A group member explains:

"The only challenge about the project is not living within the community. The problem as a teacher, especially in such a project, you do not see the challenges because you do not stay in the community."

- Female Circles of Support group member



This situation gets even more difficult when dealing with high school students because they do not like to talk about their personal problems. The school convenor says:

"...when a child walks through your classroom door, you never know what that child has been through at home, before entering the class. Children at the high school level tend to hide their shame, just because they do not want to be intimidated by any children."

- Female school convenor



Despite the challenges, this Circles of Support group has managed to refer some children that were abused to social workers and networking also seems to be effective in the community. Parents and community have positively responded to the project.

For instance, a village agent and a school convenor tell that the Circles of Support poster has been very useful to promote participation in the project. They say:

"I had put up the poster at the local market place, where women sell vegetables and fruits. The local women from the market have responded well by that every now and then they supply us with a hand full of vegetables every week... Our posters, because we are two from the high school, are placed in the staff room and on the notice board. Some children have responded by bring in pairs of socks or jersey that they wore the previous year."

- Females, village agent and school convenor



Households visited by Circles of Support

The information available for 8 households indicated that these households contained 22 school-age children, of whom 3 out of the 22 were not enrolled in school at all. Of those enrolled, all seemed to be attending school regularly.

The number of children per household visited ranged from three to five children. None of these households was regarded as child-headed households although two of them were headed by grandparents. The issues discussed at all the initial household visits included survival issues, health and schooling.

Example of Type of Household Supported: Extract from Household Visit Monitoring Form

"There are 7 children living here. 2 of them are under 6 years old, 3 children who are 7-12 years old and 2 who are 13-18 years old. 6 of them are enrolled in school and seem to be attending regularly. Their parents are never there and granny is overloaded in caring for them, and giving them food""

- Female COS group member



Impact of Circles of Support on Children's Lives

Positive changes regarding children's well-being have been reported due to the effort of the Circles of Support group as illustrated below. The school convenors point out that the project has the potential to reach the community and those who need to be supported.

Story of a child that Circles of Support has helped

"We recently helped a 9-year-old child, who was raped by her uncle. To date we, as community members, check on the child on a daily basis. However police are still investigating the case. My colleagues from the primary school told us about the cases and mention that the child needs professional help, so I have since referred the case to SWAGAA that stands for Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse"

- Female COS group member

