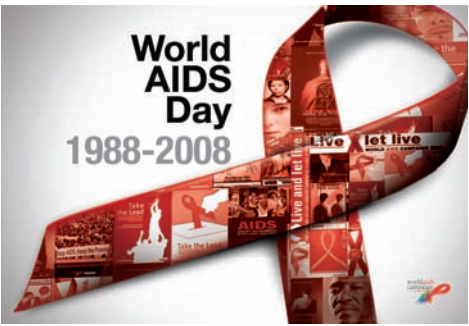


# WORLD AIDSDAY

 **Irish Aid** Department of Foreign Affairs  
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha



## Marking 20 years of support

'The full impact of what has been lost to the next generation has not yet been realised but there is no doubt that this time of AIDS has robbed many children of the opportunity to reach their full potential.'

- *An Taoiseach*, Mr Brian Cowen T.D.

Today marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day, a day when individuals and organisations from around the world unite to bring attention to the global AIDS pandemic. AIDS remains incurable and it affects millions of people around the world; today there are 33 million people living with HIV. It is the biggest cause of declining health and development progress in the worst affected coun-

tries, and the effects of HIV and AIDS devastates individuals, communities and nations.

Food security and nutrition play a crucial role in the prevention, care and treatment of HIV and AIDS. The world is facing a serious food crisis and if we are going to initiate change it is necessary to raise awareness of the importance of proper nutrition and securing food supply to developing countries. Governments, civil society and interna-

tional partners must maintain the momentum and intensify action against the AIDS epidemic.

Ireland is playing its part. Recent growth in Ireland's official aid programme, Irish Aid, has made Ireland the sixth largest donor per capita in the world. In his key-note address at an International forum on children affected by HIV and AIDS held in Dublin in October of this year, An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, reconfirmed Ireland's com-

mitment to poverty reduction and to intensifying its support to children affected by HIV & AIDS. 'I can assure you that Ireland will continue to play its part so that every child can realise their full potential and live a life free of disease, poverty and hunger'.

This World AIDS Day is marked by significant progress but there are still many challenges. We have come a long way in the past 20 years but there is still much more to be done.



### DID YOU KNOW?

It is estimated that in excess of 1,000 children become infected with HIV daily and 2 million children are living with HIV worldwide.

UNAIDS, Epidemic Update, 2008



## Securing food for a healthier future

**Peter Tobin** reports on the importance of nutrition and food security in HIV affected countries.

The impact of the global AIDS epidemic is being intensified by one very important component - lack of food. It is often a factor that is neglected but it is crucial to increasing our understanding and awareness of the link between food security, nutrition and HIV. The global food crisis is threatening HIV control and without effective policies and programmes in place, the prevention, care and treatment of HIV becomes increasingly difficult.

Hunger and HIV often coexist and interact. According to the World Food Programme, 22 of 30 high-risk countries in need of external food assistance are in Sub-Saharan Africa, countries suffering from serious AIDS epidemics. Malnutrition can exacerbate the effects of HIV and speed up the onset of AIDS-related illnesses.

Stuart Gillespie is the director of RENEWAL; a regional network of food and nutrition-relevant organisations and partners in AIDS and public health. RENEWAL is active in 5 'hub' Sub-Saharan African Countries (Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, South Africa and Kenya) and is supported by Irish Aid through its regional HIV & AIDS programme in Eastern and Southern Africa. RENEWAL is working to enhance understanding of the worsening interactions between malnutrition and AIDS and to put an



HIV lens on food policy and agriculture.

'An individual who is malnourished and starts taking drugs is at least six times more likely to die, even on the drugs, in a period of six to 12 months because he or she is malnourished,' says Stuart. A lack of nutrition affects survival outcomes and affects a person's ability to tolerate antiretroviral drugs, because the body cannot hold the high level of toxins when there is not enough nutritional support.

Adults living with HIV require 10-30 per cent more energy and children may need up to 100 per cent more, which means that the rising cost of food threatens their survival. Stuart has worked to enhance under-

standing of the relationship between food security and HIV/AIDS, encouraging the adoption of policies and programmes that are more HIV responsive. A lack of previous research shows just how important it is to conduct research in this area and direct attention towards the importance of food security and nutritional assistance in controlling the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Dr Rahul Rawat, postdoctoral research fellow at The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), is also trying to document the impact that food support and intervention programmes have on individuals infected with HIV and their households. 'Even though we've known for some time how critical food

and nutrition is to HIV-infected individuals, there hasn't been very rigorous evidence available,' says Dr Rawat. 'Having this will be an advocacy tool for groups like the World Food Programme.'

The challenge now is to find a way to apply what has been learnt on a small scale and enact change on a bigger level. 'Many interventions tend to be short-term solutions and we must try to think more about long-term food and nutrition security,' says Dr Rawat. The face of the HIV pandemic has changed, drastically over the last 20 years, and it is time to look at ways of catalysing change on a large scale to deal with the many challenges associated with HIV and AIDS.

## A lifetime of dedication in Africa

Fr Michael Kelly talks to **Pnina Friedland** about the challenges of the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and what needs to be done.

Fr Michael Kelly, an Irish Jesuit and internationally renowned expert on HIV and AIDS, moved to Zambia 53 years ago. Originally from Tullamore, Fr Kelly is now a Zambian citizen and he has dedicated his life to working for the rights of individuals infected with HIV. He has focused his efforts on addressing HIV/AIDS through education, as he believes it is through education that this epidemic can be dealt with - through primary education, community education, education at every level.

'I have been involved with education in Zambia for the past 50 years, and it became very apparent to me in the late 1980s that the epidemic and education were closely intertwined,' says Fr Kelly, now a retired professor of education. The role of education is vital in influencing attitudes and mental approaches, and almost every child can be reached this way.

Education plays a critical role in the prevention of HIV and AIDS and to address this problem seriously we must take a holistic approach to the epidemic, considering the many factors involved in HIV prevention, care and treatment. Surveys have shown that since the mid-1990s the prevalence of HIV has been

lower among educated people and communities.

The face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic has changed significantly over the past 20 years. The extension of antiretroviral treatments has been incredibly important in controlling HIV. However, prevention has been a major challenge and the disease is spreading at a rapid rate. Fr Kelly explains that we have not always invested enough resources in preventing the spread of the disease, so we have a situation as it was in 2007 where 2.1 million people died of HIV or HIV-related sicknesses, but also 2.5 million new infections occurred. About half a million children become infected each year through HIV transmission from mother to child, while the rate in Ireland is in the region of 1%. We need to intensify our response to ensure timely delivery of HIV treatment to children.

There are many challenges associated with this illness and for Fr Kelly probably the most difficult to deal with is the subordination of women. 'If we could overcome the second class status of women, I think we would go a huge distance in dealing with this disease,' he says. 'Getting down to the norms that are underlying a lot of the practices in society - that make us in almost every part of the world a patriarchal society - and



**Fr Michael Kelly, internationally renowned expert on AIDS and HIV**

getting down to the norms that sanction such things as multiple partnerships, as this is something that drives the disease very rapidly.'

Another challenge is keeping this issue a priority in the public eye and maintaining awareness of and involvement in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The cost of dealing with this is a long-term challenge and it must be kept on top of the world's agenda. 'Ireland is doing very well in committing a great deal of resources, and if all countries do what Ireland is trying to do we will have a better chance of getting the resources we need,' says Fr Kelly.

Fr Kelly reiterates one important point that was made at the 2008 Global Partners Forum on Children Affected by HIV and AIDS - that our actions and interventions 'should be AIDS-sensitive but not AIDS-exclusive, because if we are AIDS-exclusive we are forgetting some of the other major social problems such as hunger, poverty, corruption and joblessness, that are all occurring in the same milieu.' While HIV/AIDS remains a health problem, it

is not strictly a health issue but a development issue that has to be approached on a very broad front.

'We have to deal not just with the immediate causes of this disease such as sexual activity or injection drug use or mother to child transmission, but also deal with the underlying and structural causes,' says Fr Kelly. There are many other factors involved, such as economic inequality within the country and between countries, issues of trade, food and nutrition, stigma and discrimination, and human rights issues.

In recognition of his work on HIV and AIDS, Prof Kelly was awarded an Honorary Degree from University College Dublin in 2006. In addition, in 2006 he was honoured by the Minister of State for Overseas Development and Human Rights for his work on HIV and AIDS. This award consisted of an annual lecture series in his name and a fellowship scheme in his name for Zambian students to undertake further education and research on HIV/AIDS.

To read his full lecture visit [www.irishaid.gov.ie/hivandaids](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/hivandaids).





Rosa wearing a mask she made in art class at Chamanculo Health Centre.

# Living positively with HIV in Mozambique

Rosa and her mother Thelma, who also has HIV, have been coming to Chamanculo day hospital since 2006, when they were first diagnosed. Chamanculo, in Mozambique's capital Maputo, specialises in the care of children living with HIV, with 325 child patients currently on life-prolonging anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment. Rather than attending their local health centre, the two travel around 4km to Chamanculo because Thelma is afraid they will be stigmatised if people in the neighbourhood find out they are HIV positive.

**There are over 100,000 people on ARV treatment, which only became available in Mozambique in 2003**

The ARV treatment process requires that patients take the medication at precise 12 hour intervals. For young children with HIV, this means their carers have a significant responsibility. The counselling service provided by Chamanculo day hospital gives specific support to parents, family members and other carers to this end.

Chamanculo is one of two day hospitals and five health centres being managed by Medecins sans Frontiers Switzerland in Maputo. In total, around 7,000 patients at these day hospitals and health centres are on ARV treatment. As well as treatment and counselling, MSF is also engaged in training national health staff and staff from other NGOs in HIV treatment, with a view to building the local capacity.

**Irish Aid provided €15.5 million in support to the national health fund in Mozambique in 2007**

At 16%, the HIV prevalence rate in Mozambique is one of the highest in the world, with an estimated 500 new infections every day. HIV is a major focus of Irish Aid's support in Mozambique. In 2007, Irish Aid contributed €15.5 million to the national health sector basket fund, a pooled funding mechanism, which includes funding for HIV treatment and care. €11.5 million of this was channelled through the Clinton Foundation, which has worked with the government to improve access to ARV treatment.

# Ireland is demonstrating leadership in tackling the global HIV and AIDS pandemic

Minister for Foreign Affairs, **Micheál Martin, T.D.**

Every country has been affected by the AIDS pandemic, but without a doubt its impact has been most devastating in poor and developing nations. Within these countries, the greatest suffering has been among the most vulnerable members of the community, and in particular, women and children. The human and social impact of the virus often represents a major additional burden on top of the growing challenges of climate change and increased food insecurity.

I believe that the struggle against HIV and AIDS is a fundamental element of the fight to end global poverty. It is therefore crucial to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In recent years, we have maintained a strong focus on the fight against HIV and AIDS in the work of the Government's overseas development programme, Irish Aid.

Today, as we mark World AIDS Day, 33 million people worldwide are living with HIV. The majority are in developing countries, over two thirds of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. The human toll is almost incalculable. There is also a huge economic cost – undermining economic growth and greatly compromising the capacity of Governments to deliver effective health, education and other vital services to their people.

This year, we have chosen nutrition and food insecurity as the main themes for marking World AIDS Day. Good nutrition may delay the progression from HIV to AIDS. Regular treatment is vital, but people living with HIV must have sufficient nutrients to remain healthy. Rising food prices and crop failures in already weakened societies pose a serious threat to people living with the virus in developing countries. This threat makes Irish Aid's support for home-based care programmes more important than ever.

The Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, is currently reviewing the Irish Aid programme to determine how best we



can respond to the important recommendations from the Hunger Task Force Report, which the Taoiseach launched at the United Nations in New York in September. This includes a close examination of the particular impact that food insecurity has on households and communities affected by HIV and AIDS, and the difference that we can make in our response.

Ireland has been particularly successful in extending access to HIV treatment through the Irish Aid partnership with the Clinton Foundation and the Governments of Mozambique and Lesotho. The Clinton Foundation has been instrumental in lowering the cost of anti-retroviral medications and our support is now making them accessible to people in these countries.

We also recognise the importance of addressing HIV and AIDS at home here in Ireland. Two years ago, on World AIDS Day, the

Government launched a national campaign to increase awareness of HIV and AIDS in Ireland – and to address the irrational stigma still too often attached to HIV. The Stamp Out Stigma Campaign includes organisations involved in addressing HIV and AIDS in Ireland linked with those in the developing world.

World AIDS Day provides an opportunity to highlight the impact of HIV and AIDS in our own country as well


as in the most seriously affected by the pandemic. This is a day where we can demonstrate solidarity with those most affected and identify opportunities to tackle the web of factors contributing to the spread of HIV across the world, including stigma and discrimination.

We all have a contribution to make in the years ahead. The Government is determined that Ireland will continue to play its part.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 2007, an estimated 270,000 children died of AIDS-related causes; the vast majority of these deaths were preventable.

UNAIDS, Epidemic Update, 2008



# Fighting poverty and hunger and making a difference in addressing the global HIV and AIDS pandemic

Minister of State for Overseas Development, **Peter Power, T.D.**

Over the past eight years, Ireland has prioritised the fight against HIV and AIDS as fundamental to poverty and vulnerability reduction in developing countries. World AIDS Day provides an opportunity to reflect on progress being made and the key challenges ahead.

The past decade has seen a growing international recognition of the threat that HIV and AIDS poses to economic and social development. However, with 7,000 new HIV infections every day, there can be no room for complacency. The impact of the pandemic is increasingly being felt and the number of children affected by HIV and AIDS is rising. Current estimates are that 15 million children worldwide have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

Stopping the number of new infections is at the core of our HIV strategy. This year, Ireland launched a five-year national HIV prevention action plan. It prioritises the need for strong leadership, increasing knowledge and awareness of HIV transmission and providing key prevention services to those most at risk.

I believe that we need to continue to invest in good quality science to find effective



HIV preventive vaccines and microbicides directed at controlling the pandemic. Female controlled HIV prevention commodities will be central to addressing women and young girls' disproportionate vulnerability to HIV.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of HIV and AIDS. HIV-positive

children are significantly less likely to receive anti-retrovirals than HIV-positive adults and many national strategies to address the needs of children remain largely unimplemented. For instance, only 15 per cent of orphans are now receiving some form of assistance.

The Government has prioritised the needs of children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. In early October, I hosted the 4th Global Partners Forum on Children affected by HIV and AIDS. This significant event agreed key priorities to address the needs of children living in a world with HIV.


I am also determined to develop further Ireland's strong focus on the world hunger crisis. We must address its root causes, as well as dealing with the impact of the current food price crisis, which has had a devastating impact

on AIDS-affected communities. The Government will be responding positively and actively to the challenging recommendations of the Hunger Task Force, which was established to examine how Ireland can play a leading role on the hunger crisis. For me, our response represents a priority and a personal obligation.

Ireland and the Irish people can be proud of the contribution we are making to the global HIV and AIDS pandemic; significant progress is being made. However, the articles in this supplement bear testimony to the many challenges that people continue to face. The Government's aid programme, Irish Aid, has one over-arching objective: global poverty reduction. The strong focus on addressing HIV and AIDS remains fundamental to our work to reduce poverty, vulnerability and inequality.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Malnutrition can exacerbate the effects of HIV and hasten AIDS-related illnesses in people living with HIV.







# WORLD AIDSDAY



Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for HIV & AIDS in Africa, Elizabeth Mataka.

## United against an epidemic

Elizabeth Mataka has worked at the forefront of the response to the AIDS epidemic for the best part of two decades. She talks to **Peter Tobin** about the changing nature of the disease and its effect on communities in Africa.

Elizabeth Mataka, the current Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for HIV/AIDS in Africa, has over 18 years of experience working in the field of HIV/AIDS. In the 20 years since World AIDS Day first helped raise awareness and promote education,

Mataka has both seen and helped bring about many changes and improvements in her native Zambia and other countries. 'We have moved from a sense of fatality to hope. We have seen improvements in the lives of people living with AIDS through anti-retroviral treatment. We

have seen people who maybe 10 or 15 years ago would have been given up for dead – we have seen them recover, take up employment again and go on to raise their children, which is something that impacts very significantly on our families and our communities.' These improvements,

while they should be celebrated, must be recognised for what they are: improvements. There is still a lot to be done and work, in this respect, is never finished. 'Obviously we are still faced with a very aggressive and a very bad situation,' says Mataka. All UN member states

### DID YOU KNOW?

Rising energy prices, income and population growth, globalisation, and urbanisation are among the major forces driving global food prices.



## The change we need

Many of us in Ireland have forgotten that HIV infection is common here. In Ireland by the end of 2007, 4781 people were diagnosed with HIV. Some from the 1980s and '90s have died. Most now are alive and well, due to successful effective treatment provided by the Irish health services. Most look and feel completely normal and get on with living their lives as they want to. Most have only told their intimate partner, a few friends and one or two family members about their infection. The pandemic is still spreading here quite rapidly. There are hundreds of newly infected people each year here. Many are not diagnosed until late in the illness. An audit done in Beaumont Hospital indicated that 66% of newly diagnosed people had missed opportunities for earlier diagnosis. 'Twenty years ago, there were a lot of people dying from HIV. It was a killer disease and it was very much on the radar,' says Prof Samuel McConkey, Head of Department of International Health and Tropical Medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons. 'Nowadays, many people think that just because HIV has gone out of the public eye in Ireland that it has therefore disappeared, but it hasn't,' he says. The most recent report by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) indicates that in 2007 there were 362 newly diagnosed HIV infections reported. This compares to 337 in 2006 and represents a 7.4 per cent increase in Ireland. HIV can be controlled with anti retroviral drugs and early diagnosis can help stop the transmission of HIV to others. Prof McConkey says that 'it is very much an active illness and prevention should be brought back to the forefront of the Irish agenda.' His advice for sexually active people is that 'if you have had sex once without a condom, you are at risk. A HIV test each year, for early diagnosis and treatment is best for you. Ask your family doctor about a HIV test.'

## Stamping out stigma

Stigma and discrimination are still an issue in Ireland, writes **Pnina Friedland**.

On World AIDS Day 2006 the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern launched the Stamp Out Stigma campaign to raise awareness of HIV stigma and discrimination. Two years later, Stamp Out Stigma is still working to promote awareness and, according to vice-chair of the campaign, Ciaran McKinney, 'to highlight the irrationality of HIV-related stigma and to show how it feeds directly into discrimination.' The Stamp Out Stigma campaign is a partnership between Government, Civil

Society, and People living with HIV and is funded by Irish Aid and the Department of Health and Children. This unique consortium of stakeholders has brought together a wealth of experience that has informed the campaign. The stigma and discrimination which people who live with HIV are subjected to is not only hurtful and misplaced, it is also affecting testing rates and the transmission of HIV. 'One of the impacts is that people are reluctant to come forward for testing,' says McKinney, 'so we have a concern that

there are still a significant number of people who are unaware of their HIV status. A direct result of that is that people tend to come forward for treatment quite late and health outcomes are hugely improved the earlier you begin treatment.' Another detrimental and potentially disastrous effect of stigma is that those who are unaware they are carrying the virus may be unintentionally passing it on. People living with HIV need services, care and the support of their communities, not to be discriminated against and marginalised.



In a recent study, the Stamp Out Stigma campaign uncovered interesting results. Eighty-four per cent

of HIV positive individuals identify social stigma and discrimination, claiming that people with HIV are viewed negatively by Irish society. This view is backed up by the fact that more than one in three people living in Ireland today say they would keep the HIV status of a family member secret. The perpetual ignorance surrounding HIV transmission is seen in the fact that almost a quarter of people would be worried about eating a meal prepared by someone with HIV. This is compounded by the fact that there are still people in Ireland, albeit a minority, who believe that individuals

“One of the impacts is that people are reluctant to come forward for testing”

with HIV only have themselves to blame. The pervasive nature of stigmatisation is also felt by people living with HIV among friends and family. Almost half claim discrimination by friends while just over a quarter claim discrimination by family. McKinney says, 'one of the greatest areas of discrimination was among family and friends, people being told

they're not allowed to touch their niece or having to eat from separate plates and with separate cutlery. The fact that these things are still happening in 2008, 25 years into the epidemic, is really shocking.' In the 20 years since World AIDS Day was established, Ciaran McKinney has seen huge changes and especially in Ireland. 'Ireland has very, very good services available to people who have HIV. They might be stretched but they are of an extraordinarily high standard. So the medical care for people who are HIV positive in Ireland is second to none.' The stigma associated with HIV still exists, however, and McKinney thinks that education and prevention are the keys to defeating it. He says, 'what should be implemented is a national, coordinated HIV prevention and education strategy or campaign. For every case of HIV you can prevent you are saving roughly €1 million over the course of the life of a HIV positive person.'

### DID YOU KNOW?

862,000,000 people do not have enough food







# WORLD AIDSDAY



# Children in developing countries are in danger of being left behind in the battle against HIV and AIDS

## Global Partners Forum meeting in Dublin builds commitment for children

It is estimated that more than 1,000 children become infected with HIV daily and two million children are living with HIV worldwide. While not infected, many more children are affected by this disease, with an estimated 15 million under the age of 18 having lost one or both parents to AIDS, 12 million of them resident in sub-Saharan Africa.

Against this backdrop, the 4th Global Partners Forum on Children Affected by HIV and AIDS was co-hosted by Irish Aid and UNICEF at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on the 6th and 7th of October this year. The Forum brought together leaders in Government, civil society and UN agencies with the aim of providing momentum in fulfilling global commitments to children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Attended by over 200 par-



Annie Lennox speaking at the Global Partners Forum meeting in Dublin

ticipants from 42 countries, the Forum explored key recommendations arising from

global evidence. Taoiseach Brian Cowen stressed the need to work with developing country partners to support the introduction of accessible, affordable and sustainable social protection frameworks to mitigate the impact of poverty and HIV. The Taoiseach drew parallels with Ireland's experience of the introduction of pensions and allowances, which continue to be important instruments in responding to household and child poverty throughout the country.

Singer, songwriter and

AIDS activist, Annie Lennox, spoke of the glaring gap in access to treatments that help prevent mother to child transmission. In sub-Saharan Africa about one in three children born to a HIV-infected mother will test positive, while in Ireland the rate of transmission is less than one per cent.

Concrete actions that reflect the global commitment to address this crisis are outlined in the communiqué adopted by the participants at the 2008 Forum,

available to download from Irish Aid's website, [www.irishaid.gov.ie/development\\_aids.asp](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/development_aids.asp).

Ireland is investing significant resources in interventions to benefit children with HIV and AIDS, recognising HIV/AIDS as a key determinant of child poverty and vulnerability. Our response is documented in Guidelines for Children Living in the Context of HIV and AIDS, which is also available on Irish Aid's website, [www.irishaid.gov.ie](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie).



## Take the first step towards making a difference

Drop into the **Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre** on O'Connell Street, Dublin.

Learn more about the challenges facing developing countries and how changes to your life could help some of the world's poorest people.

➔ [www.irishaid.gov.ie](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie)



## VOX POPS

Last month students from Portmarnock Community School in Dublin visited the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre. This is what they had to say about the global impact of HIV and AIDS.



Sean McKiernan 17

'People in Ireland and the West don't really have a clue what's going on in Africa. A thousand people die every day as a result of AIDS and most of that could be treatable if they got anti retroviral drugs. I think it's very important for people to be aware of these issues because they can be solved if given enough political effort behind them.'



Mark Whelan 18

'We're the future generation, so if we're all well educated on it it's hopefully a stepping stone towards understanding the disease and working to overcome it. There should be more awareness raised, and schools are helping to do this and hopefully it's only a matter of time before some dramatic changes can be made.'



Catherine Healy 17

'I think we need to keep reminding ourselves just how big the issue is, because it's easy to forget about it in the society that we live in. In 20 years time people our age are going to be running the country and we're going to be immersed in situations where we can have a direct effect on the third world and it's at this point now that we need to make our voices heard as young people.'



Lisa Boyle 18

'It's great to get involved through schools and charities, because if you're getting involved you get to see the results for yourselves. If you're just donating money you don't get a chance to immerse yourself in the issue.'

# Protecting society's most vulnerable

by Linda Richter

In 2007, UNICEF estimated that 2 million children were living with HIV, eight times the number in 1990. Annually, three times more children are now becoming infected with or dying due to HIV/AIDS, compared to 1990. 90% of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa, where 12.1 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Our knowledge about children affected by HIV/AIDS is still very limited, but we know that many children in great need are being neglected.

### WHAT IS WRONG?

HIV prevention is failing children. Although we can prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV very effectively, most HIV-positive children are still infected during childbirth or breastfeeding.

Children with HIV have less access to diagnosis and treatment than adults. Only 8% of infants in low- and middle-income countries are tested within two months of birth, only about 10% of children with HIV receive ARVs, and fewer than 4% of two-month-olds exposed to HIV receive co-trimoxazole, which protects them from a range of opportunistic infections.

Orphans are not the only children affected by HIV/AIDS, and are seldom worse off than other children in AIDS-affected communities. Singling out orphans for special assistance may lead to other equally destitute and needy children and families being neglected.

Most children affected by HIV/AIDS are supported by families or extended kin, themselves struggling with poverty. However, fewer than 15% of these households receive any external assistance.

Most efforts to protect children affected by HIV/AIDS are small, local projects run by charities. While valuable, these can only go so far. What is needed now is a basic level of government support for families, combined with large-scale, long-term public health approaches.

The Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS (JLICA) is an alliance of researchers, policymakers, activists, and peo-

ple living with HIV, working to provide evidence on how to improve the health and life chances of children affected by HIV/AIDS. Supported by Irish Aid, JLICA over a two-year period has compiled evidence-based recommendations that have the capacity to shape policies and programmes that will improve the survival and wellbeing of vulnerable children:

1. Policies, programmes and funding for children must be targeted at their families. Families provide the best and most efficient care for children. Strengthening families through systematic, public sector initiatives is critical to protecting children from the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

2. HIV services must be targeted at families, not individuals. Interventions for child wellbeing must be comprehensive, and address basic material needs, psychosocial wellbeing and cognitive development along with physical health.

3. Greater attention must be given to social welfare for poor families. The estimated cost of universal old-age pensions, primary education, primary health care and child benefit payments is an affordable 1.5 to 4.5% of GDP for low-income African countries.

4. More money must go directly to families in need. Income transfers have impressive results in supporting poor and vulnerable families, including those affected by HIV and AIDS.

Prevention, treatment and care for adults and children must be urgently improved and expanded, through good leadership and commitment to a rights-based approach. Today, World AIDS Day, is the time to recognise the right of the poorest families in the poorest countries to social protection and services.

**Linda Richter is Executive Director of Child Youth Family & Social Development (CYFSD), Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa and Co-Chair of the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and AIDS (JLICA).**



11 of the children who participated in the Conference. In total, 13 children from 9 countries, including Ireland, took part.

# Transition Year students fight for change

Education is one of the most important aspects of humanity's response to the AIDS epidemic. In the past 25 years, HIV and AIDS have taken advantage of ignorance, misconceptions and fear to spread to unprecedented levels throughout the world. Dispelling the myths, uncovering the fear and,

most importantly, educating younger generations are key to defeating the pandemic.

Irish Aid, in its centre on O'Connell St in Dublin, provides the opportunity for schools and groups to learn about the crisis and get involved in programmes to help raise awareness about HIV and AIDS in their own communities and also help people suffering around the world.

Dominique Twomey, a Transition Year student in Gort Community School, spoke at the recent Global Partners Forum on Children Affected by HIV and AIDS. Dominique and her classmates undertook a project in advance of the Forum, making over 700 gifts for the Forum's attendees. These gifts were eggs which contained a boy or girl made from pipe cleaners; each egg represented a child who

becomes infected with HIV every day.

In her speech, Dominique stressed the importance of the rights of children everywhere and especially those children living with HIV and AIDS. Addressing the various representatives from around the world, Dominique left them with this message: 'Don't underestimate your power to "be the change in the world" that children affected or infected by HIV and AIDS need and deserve.'

Dominique presented An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen, with one of the 700 eggs - to remind him how fragile the lives of children are without proper love and care. Dominique also shared with everyone the motto on Gort Community School's crest, a timely reminder of how to achieve change: "Ní neart go cur le chéile" ("There is no strength without unity").

## DID YOU KNOW?

Adults living with HIV require 10-30% more energy than before they were infected, and children may need up to 100% more.

UNAIDS Policy Brief on HIV, Nutrition and Food Security, May 2008

