



**STRONG FAMILIES,  
STRONG CHILDREN**

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# KEEPING CHILDREN

## AND THEIR FAMILIES TOGETHER

Children are at the heart of development policy. If we wish to achieve our development goals, we will have to strive for happy, healthy children who will grow up to take their place in society and in the world – and change it for the better. But we all need to work together to make sure that children are looked after. Strengthening families is essential to prevent the separation of children from their families. This is at the core of the action of SOS Children’s Villages, which supports vulnerable children and their families worldwide. This publication shows how important it is to take a child-centered approach in working with children and families at risk of separation. It is an inspiration for all countries, since these problems are unfortunately not unique to developing countries.

In my own work as European Commissioner in charge of Development Policy, I also have a special focus on Children. My main objective for my mandate as Commissioner is to ensure that the European Union will help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Goals have a special focus on children, caring about the most vulnerable people. We aim to reduce poverty, fight hunger; ensure that children will live healthier and longer, and that mothers will be safe giving birth. We also focus on children attending school and ensuring the rights of girls and women.

Unfortunately, maternal health and child mortality is where we still have the furthest to go. It is then good news that the UN General-Secretary Ban Ki-moon has a special focus on this, and has just published a “Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health” in connection with the UN summit on the Millennium Development Goals in New York in September. The Secretary General rightly puts the focus on the core role of the family and underlines

the need to ensure the best conditions so that children are not separated from their families.

The European Union also has a comprehensive policy on children’s rights in its external actions. The Development ministers from all EU countries adopted in 2008 a framework for the protection and promotion of children’s rights in third countries. The essence is that in order to achieve the overall goal of poverty reduction, it is essential to enhance families’ capacities to assure the well-being of their children. Both the European Union and The United Nations have affirmed the fundamental role of families as a natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children.

But however important the official aid will be, we can not imagine a world where all of us would not try to do the best we can for children. This is where the work done by SOS Children’s Villages is so important. The work done in each country for each child, but also the contributions from the millions of sponsors around the world, who gain insight into the lives of children in other countries, and who hope that their contribution can change at least one life for the better.

All of this contributes to help keep families and children together, and to ensure a better future for the children. I wish you the best of luck with this inspiring publication, and hope your work will continue. ❖

Andris Piebalgs,  
European Commissioner for Development



# A LOVING HOME

## FOR EVERY CHILD

To be looked after and shown care, to be guarded and protected by loving parents. Millions of children worldwide are denied this kind of childhood. They grow up without parental care, having lost one or both parents, or because their families were not able to care for them. All too often the reason for this, whether directly or indirectly, is poverty. Many of these children are pressured into contributing to the family income, which means they cannot attend school. These are the children that SOS Children's Villages focuses on, to provide them with the good conditions which will allow them to grow up into independent and responsible members of society, and to develop their potential. And the best way to provide these kinds of conditions is in a family setting.

The kind of support children and their families need is different from child to child, from family to family. Together with the children and families who have been affected, the community, and other partners, we are looking for answers, and we are developing programme guidelines and activities. We work with and for disadvantaged families to prevent crises that can in the worst case scenario lead to children being placed in alternative care. SOS Children's Villages offers various forms of support to strengthen and stabilise families as much as possible so that they can once again manage their lives independently and care for their children. These initiatives rely heavily on the self-organisation and resources of the families and communities. Equal rights to education and

training for children are another important area of work. It is only when, despite support, families are still not in a position to care for their children, or for children who have no family, that SOS Children's Villages offers long-term placement in an SOS family.

Our aim is to develop support mechanisms in the "best interests of the child" and in doing so, to act in the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. These Guidelines, welcomed by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 2009, are an opportunity to improve the lives of children growing up without parental care. SOS Children's Villages, together with its partners in the development of the Guidelines, is confident that they are a significant way to lobby for optimum legal and administrative conditions for children that have to grow up without parental care.

The starting point and goal of our work is to respect, promote, and to stand up for the rights of children. We need to bring the problems children face to the attention of decision-makers and the public, and demand measures that serve the best interests of children all over the world. This includes encouraging children to actively participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, and, where possible, to represent themselves and their rights.

We don't just want to give children a future – children need a good present. The future starts today. Here. Now. ❖



Christian Posch  
SOS Children's Villages International  
International Programme Development Director



Wilfried Vyslozil  
Hermann-Gmeiner-Fonds  
Managing Director

# ALTERNATIVE CARE





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# FOR CHILDREN – A UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK

On 20 November 2009 – the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – the UN General Assembly welcomed the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

Families at risk of slipping into poverty are particularly in danger of neglecting or abusing their children. Children are then often faced with the situation of no longer being able to live with their parents and are exposed to poverty and discrimination. These Guidelines are a big step towards improving the lives of children growing up without parental care.

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (hereinafter referred to as “the Guidelines”) are the result of a five-year collaboration between various non-governmental organisations, including SOS Children’s Villages International and International Social Service (ISS). Also involved was the “Group of Friends”, a working group of various governments, chaired by the Brazilian government. The Guidelines are a non-binding soft law text and list of directives for policy and practice in order to guarantee fundamental human rights of those children who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing it. They are a tool to develop or reform policy guidelines, to translate them into workable standards and therefore improve practice.

At the core of the Guidelines are two principles: the principle of necessity, and the principle of appropriateness. They determine all decisions relating to children without parental care or children at risk of losing parental care. Thus, the decision to separate a child from his/her parents must be a necessity, and when that decision is made, the type of alternative care selected for the child must be appropriate to his/her specific needs.



### THE NECESSITY PRINCIPLE

The Guidelines leave no doubt that separating a child from the family must be the absolute last resort. Therefore, the Guidelines provide a series of measures to enable the child to stay in his/her family:

- › Promoting parental care: measures such as training, education and information sessions can improve the ability of parents to care for their children. Poverty should not be a reason to separate children from their parents, and so the promotion of income generation is among the measures designed to enable children to remain in their families. Even services such as childcare or combating drug abuse can help to create a family environment, and prevent the children from having to go into foster care.
- › Preventing the separation of the family: a careful survey of the living conditions of the family helps to assess whether it is in the interests of the child to be separated from his/her family. All parties concerned are involved in this process – not least the child and his/her family. If the decision is made that the child should live apart from his/her family, the family is informed of their rights, which includes the ability to appeal against the decision.
- › Promoting the child’s return to the family of origin: the Guidelines provide steps to maintain contact between the child and the family if this is in the best interests of the child, and regular checks are made to see whether it is possible to reunite the family. If this is the case, a plan is developed by all the parties concerned with clear targets and a framework for monitoring. The implementation of the plan should be carried out under appropriate supervision, such as via home visits.

### THE APPROPRIATENESS PRINCIPLE

If the decision is made to place a child in alternative care, the Guidelines state that the form of care chosen must be in the best interests of the child, and is tailored to his/her individual situation.

The Guidelines recommend that, in addition to formal care, informal options should be considered too, such as placing the child in his/her extended family of origin. The Guidelines describe the role and responsibilities of the authorities in that case. They speak clearly for deinstitutionalisation and placement in foster families or small groups. Nevertheless, the Guidelines make no hierarchy in terms of forms of alternative care, but stress that the case of each child must be analysed and an individually-tailored solution must be found. It is important to ensure that social, emotional and all other needs of the child are met.

The decision on the form of care should be made as part of a participatory process, where everyone involved is informed about the advantages and disadvantages of the care option



available. Thought should also be given — alongside the individual needs of the child — as to whether the stay should be short or long-term, to keeping siblings together and what options there are for reintegration. The child, the parents, or other guardians should have the opportunity to challenge the initial assessment and any related decisions.

A periodic review, to take place at least every three months, is recommended to examine the planning of care, the appropriateness of the placement, the continuing need for alternative care, and the possibility of reintegration into the family of origin. At the same time, the Guidelines speak for the stability of placement: the child should not have to change from one placement to another and should live in a family-based or small group placement and have the opportunity to return to his/her family of origin if this is in the best interests of the child.

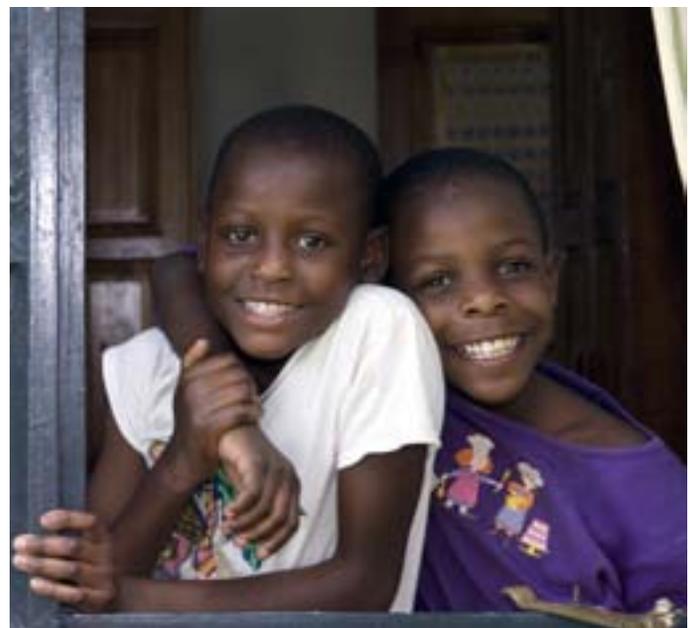
The Guidelines recommend that a code of conduct be drawn up that guides the support staff and clearly sets out their role, their responsibilities and obligations. In particular, training on exercising children's rights is recommended, not only in terms of care but also in terms of education, health, identity and the special needs of children. This may reflect the decision-making process and improve the provision of appropriate care. Training is also required to competently deal with conflicts.

## USING AVAILABLE CHANCES

The Guidelines are an important tool for social work, in particular with regards to the rights of the child and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Both state and private providers of alternative care should see them as an opportunity to improve policy and practice. For people who work in this area, they are an opportunity to ask for training and professional development. They are designed first and foremost to strengthen and support vulnerable children and their families. Only in cases where prevention work has not been successful and there is a need to separate the child from his/her family, the Guidelines ensure that appropriate decisions are taken.

SOS Children's Villages and all the other partners who took part in the development of the Guidelines are confident that they are a great opportunity to further develop and improve the standard of alternative care. The Guidelines offer the opportunity to advocate an optimal legal and administrative environment in which children are allowed to remain in their families or, if this is not possible, to find an appropriate form of alternative care.

The experience of childcare that SOS Children's Villages has gained since 1949 was included in the Guidelines and has therefore formed a good framework for the alternative care of children. The following pages make clear that SOS Children's Villages in its family strengthening activities has been committed for years to enabling children to grow up in their families of origin. The Guidelines are therefore a document that can be brought to life through practice. ❖



# WRECKING A BIRD'S NEST



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter referred to as “the Convention”) and the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children state that it is in the best interests of children to be brought up in their own families, where they should be shown love, feel a sense of belonging, and have long-term relationships to prepare them for adulthood. Article 7 of the Convention says that the child shall have, “as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.” The Convention sees separating children from their families of origin as being the last step after everything that can be done has been done to support parents in their responsibilities. Yet too often the chaos and pressure of extreme poverty breaks families apart, robbing both parents and children of their dignity, the very dignity which forms the basis of the Convention.

Part of being born into chronic poverty is being subject to mistrust. Society assumes that very poor adults are unable to be loving and responsible parents, and that their children can only benefit from being removed from their family. Our experience shows, on the contrary, that children who have lost contact with their family of origin as a result of extreme poverty face a heightened risk of emotional insecurity, educational failure, abuse and violence.<sup>1</sup> Time and again, they say how irreplaceable their families are:

“Family is the most important thing. Without our family, we cannot live; we cannot grow up. But a family cannot live without friendship in the community. Friendship makes you happy, even if you don’t have enough to eat. [...] Friendship makes it possible for us to hold hands and to look in the same direction. It destroys poverty.”

Fatimata, Western Africa



## HOW POVERTY SEPARATES PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Eugen Brand,  
Director General, International Movement ATD Fourth World

“My family has been on the streets for three years. Our last place flooded. Three children live with me. Two of my children died: one of pneumonia and one of malaria. I have given away two other daughters: Rita, who’s nine, is working as a domestic servant, and my youngest I gave away for adoption. I was afraid of what might happen if they grew up on the streets. Young girls are dragged away just because they are poor. Police harass us for sleeping on the streets. They come in the early hours, pile us into a truck, and send us to prison camps. And in those camps, they split up the families. Parents are not put together with their children. They split us up – like wrecking a bird’s nest. All we have is our family. I can’t read or write a word. But I understand that much – that what they do to us is an injustice.”

Anna, Southeast Asia

## CHALLENGES FACED BY MARGINALISED FAMILIES

Just as children cannot be seen in isolation from their families, families cannot be seen in isolation from their communities. Yet too many families live on the margins of society without friendship or support. In Guatemala for instance, the children of families on the margins may end up on the streets, with some of them ending up in prostitution. Other children find themselves drawn to drugs to blunt the pangs of hunger and despair, but these children then find themselves the objects of gang violence. Meanwhile, other parents live in the fear of their children being kidnapped for adoption. This fear is so great that it can lead expectant mothers to forgo prenatal care. In rural Burkina Faso, when children are able to attend school, however briefly, they are taught that the future of the world lies in city offices. The underlying message, that these children can learn nothing of value from their families, who live outside of town, too often makes them leave home for the city, losing their roots and putting their health and well-being at risk when they have to fend for themselves.

Industrialised countries have public systems designed to protect families in crisis. Unfortunately, all too often, long-term poverty is interpreted by well-meaning social workers as a short-term crisis. The importance of children's emotional well-being is underestimated in relation to their material well-being. The distrust of parents in poverty results in funds being spent on foster care, rather than on supporting a child's family of origin. For instance, in the United States, families who lose their housing in a fire can usually gain emergency shelter. But the bad conditions in these shelters – ranging from rodents and cockroaches to violence and drug traffic – can lead parents to feel they have no choice but to

place their children in foster care. In addition, many shelters do not allow fathers to stay with their children. In the United Kingdom, social workers are under enormous pressure to reduce any elements of risk, which leads to a disproportionate number of children from families living in poverty being removed by the authorities and put into the care system due to “neglect.” Almost everyone feels that when such children go on to become parents when they are adults that their own experience as children in the care system has not prepared them to be good parents, particularly in terms of forming an emotional bond with their child. This increases the likelihood of their children being removed from their families of origin, setting the stage for the cycle to continue over several generations.

Poverty is not the only factor which causes parents and children to be separated. The phenomena that affect children in difficult situations are complex and will not be resolved by one single measure. But poverty clearly places families at a high level of risk of separation, despite the unstinting resilience and courage that parents often show on behalf of their children. Poverty is a violation of human rights that touches all areas of human development, including health, education, and the right to self-determination.

“The lack of basic security means the absence of one or more of the factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may vary in extent, its consequences can vary in gravity, and may to a greater or lesser extent be irreversible. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of life, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY TIES

This degree of insecurity also often leads to family crises that separate family members from one another. The separation tends to rob the now isolated members of the family of their support network and makes them lose their self-esteem and courage to struggle against poverty. When people living in extreme poverty are consulted, they consistently emphasise the overriding fragility and importance of their family ties. Protecting these relationships also protects the most basic framework on which families and communities depend to survive and to thrive.

Ending the exploitation of children, which can be linked to the vulnerability suffered by people in poverty and which



tends to separate families, deserves stronger international initiatives and commitments. Protection from abuse and neglect is vital and must be vigorously defended. However the experience of ATD Fourth World and other NGOs shows that in too many cases, there is scant evidence that children benefit from being removed from their parents' care.

“A foster family cannot replace your mother and father. When my mum used to come to see me in the children's home, we would have fun together, but in the evening it was hard to leave her. When you go through that, it hurts, you feel ashamed. Some people said that we were separated because I was getting in trouble all the time. This was also said to other children in foster care. We have to do everything possible so children can live with their parents. We love our parents.”

Eric, Western Europe

While society makes an effort to support these children by sheltering them, Eric speaks of his shame of being apart from his mother. Other children say they have no point of reference without their parents. They are among the many children whose experience calls into question the support they have received. These children remind us that the family life they now lack is irreplaceable.

## LOOKING AT THE WHOLE PICTURE

Some of the things children feel and think are hard for them to express. When Katia in the US was about eleven years old, she constantly got into fights with other children. It took time to understand her anger. Katia constantly saw her mother disrespected by others. Not only did other children make fun of Katia's mother, but Katia's teacher also criticised her

when Katia arrived at school late. Her teacher did not know that Katia was arriving late because her mother had taken on an extra job early in the morning to help make ends meet. Katia needed to walk her younger sister to school and she could no longer be on time herself. Katia was hurt that just when her mother was doing more to help their family that her teacher was insisting how irresponsible her mother was.

Without giving a voice to all the members of a family in a context where each one can speak freely, we miss out on learning the whole story. The most reliable indicators in this area are qualitative, whether for measuring poverty, for determining when a child should be removed from parental care, or for determining what kind of support families need to stay together. As valuable as statistics are, they can be manipulated, fail to capture complexities, or too often completely leave out the experiences of those in the most abject situations of poverty. In-depth interviews carried out in the context of long-term relationships show that the lives of extremely poor families are weighted with chaos, crisis and incoherence. They also reveal people's resilience and determination. These factors are not captured by statistics. Nor do statistics adequately show the best way forward. It is only by involving families living in poverty in an analysis of the obstacles they face, and in the development of policies and programmes, that effective approaches for keeping families together can be developed.

No one wants children to suffer the harshness of life in poverty. As long as extreme poverty persists, some parents will feel they have no choice but to entrust their children to others, some children will end up on the streets, and child welfare systems will distrust parents' abilities to raise their children. But children themselves say time and again that they know something irreplaceable has been lost when they leave their families and communities. We owe it to all these children to find better solutions together. We must continue to invest in fighting poverty, and to support the unseen efforts made by parents in extreme poverty to care for their children in order to shape a better future for all families. ❖



1 How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights, ATD Fourth World, 2004.

2 Final UN Report on human rights and extreme poverty, submitted by the Special Rapporteur Leandro Despouy (E/CN.4/SUB.2/1996/13). This definition was first formulated by Joseph Wresinski and adopted in February 1987 by the Economic and Social Council of France. (The Wresinski Report: Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security)

# LEARNING





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## FOR A GOOD LIFE

To know, to do, to be, and to live together. This definition of “learning” comes from the Composite Learning Index 2010, the Canadian compositional indicator for lifelong learning.<sup>1</sup> Hence, relevant education will always be a combination of cognitive, social, emotional, physical and vocational stimulation. In this way a person can develop holistically as a unique human being within her/his specific context and as a member of the wider community.

The educational activities of SOS Children’s Villages are also based on this understanding of learning and education. That goes for the kindergartens, schools and vocational training centres run by SOS Children’s Villages, and its work with state-funded schools, but also capacity building measures for young people, families and communities.

The key to all these activities is that they are “relevant” – but what does it mean if we want to ensure access to relevant education? Relevant education does not mean the same everywhere, but is determined by the factors of context, economy and culture. It is also always relevant what key figures, including the children and young people, parents, politicians and practitioners collectively define as relevant, in each context.

For SOS Children’s Villages, “relevant” education is, first and foremost, making school and vocational education available to all children in SOS Children’s Village programmes. It also means ensuring all children in SOS families and families looked after by communities have access to high quality services in the area of early childhood development, for example in crèches, kindergartens and pre-schools.

In places where the government provides too few schools, or where the quality of schools is poor, SOS Children’s Villages has built new kindergartens and schools. Though building and maintaining schools is not SOS Children’s Villages’ main area of work, ensuring access to relevant education can also mean working together with community or governmental education programmes in order to support the skills and competencies of the respective schools and kindergartens. Wherever there are local opportunities for financial partnerships for existing schools and kindergartens, these should be taken advantage of. In places where governments have established free and compulsory primary education, part of SOS Children’s Villages’ mandate is to advocate that.



SOS Children’s Village also offers training for families, carers and communities, aimed at improving their attitudes, knowledge, skills, resources and structures in the area of childcare.

## SUPPORT AND ADVICE FOR FAMILIES

Since 1998, SOS Children’s Villages has been supporting families in Romania’s capital Bucharest, and since 2004, this support has come via the SOS Counselling and Support Centre for Children and Parents. The centre advises parents whose children have developmental difficulties and helps them to deal with the pressures to which their family may be exposed. The staff offer counselling, give health advice, or recommendations in relation to leisure time, or how the development of the child in question can be supported. They aim to guide parents and accompany them on a small part of their journey, which can sometimes include providing material or financial support.

Child-centred case management is at the centre of all the work carried out. Furthermore, it is important for the staff that both parents be involved as equal partners in the development and implementation of all measures.

The centre provides, among other things, a playroom for the children where manual skills can be practised, a bathroom for the children’s hygiene, and a multi-purpose room where parental guidance and school lessons take place. A further room is designed as a safe and friendly atmosphere where issues such as family, work, and sexuality can be discussed with the teenagers. The centre has good relations with other providers in this area, including the state agency for child protection, which often refers families to the SOS Counselling and Support Centre – mostly families at risk of breaking apart. The centre offers customised services and operates as part of a network. This makes it possible to put children, young people or families in touch with more suitable providers when necessary, making the centre an efficient, effective and sustainable facility. This is also reflected by the esteem in which the centre is held by both government agencies as well as by partners and customers.

## WORKING IN A NETWORK – SUSTAINABLE RESULTS

Working together with others in a network also happens to be the motto of the SOS Family Strengthening Programme in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. It came into existence in 2007 and

currently has 568 children in 227 families in its care. Most people in Bahir Dar live by providing simple services such as washing clothes, or running small shops. That means that the families – many of which are run by single mothers and chronically ill parents – barely manage to make ends meet. This has led to increased prostitution and in turn, an increase in the number of HIV/AIDS-related diseases, and many children sell chewing gum or lottery tickets on the streets.

“The overall objective of the project is to give children a good upbringing and to see that they are well cared for and provided for,” says Lulu Abera, who works in Ethiopia finding families of origin: “It often begins with trying to prevent children becoming separated from their families and being neglected.”

In Bahir Dar the focus is primarily on forming partnerships – within the community, as well as with local organisations: “We want to strengthen the competencies of the entire community. And we also hope to be able to guarantee the survival of the project,” says Lulu Abera. SOS Children’s Villages has, for example offered local organisations courses in the areas of project planning, management, community development and fundraising. The starting point of all activities, which are mostly developed jointly, is the individual situation of each child. In order to improve it, activities are offered such as day care for children, courses on the care and upbringing of children or activities designed to help parents to establish a source of income.



## FACTS AND FIGURES

Education is a right. One which is enshrined in Article 26 of the Convention on Human Rights, and in Article 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. That governments, civil society organisations and donors place a high value on education is reflected in their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the UNESCO actions for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the aims of UNESCO’s Education for All (EFA) initiative.

Yet, worldwide there are still 72 million<sup>3</sup> children without a primary education. Around 774 million<sup>4</sup> adults are illiterate, which is around a fifth of the world’s total adult population. Therefore, adult education also makes up an integral part of the lifelong learning process which is UNESCO’s mandate to ensure. At the UNESCO Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, held at Belém, Brazil in December 2009, government representatives, academics and representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations discussed the worldwide situation of adult education, and developed concepts for the coming years under the title “Living and Learning for a Viable Future – The Power of Adult Learning”.<sup>5</sup> Central to this was the question: how can adult education contribute to sustainable development in social, economic, environmental and cultural terms? For the first time ever, a Global Report on Adult Learning and Education was created, based on results from 154 country and regional reports. The report notes that strategies for adult education have been developed in all regions of the world. However, the report also highlights existing shortcomings, such as a lack of financial resources. One of the biggest challenges remains the low numbers of participants in adult education and a lack of access to further education and training opportunities.

## FAMILY IN CRISIS

When the Ionescu<sup>2</sup> family turned to the Bucharest SOS Counselling and Support Centre for Children and Parents for help, neither Mr nor Mrs Ionescu was in work, but they had seven small children to provide for. “The family’s income consisted of the state child allowance and a small minimum wage, also paid for by the state,” describes Dorina, the social worker in charge of their case. “The family lived in a sparsely furnished two-bedroom flat which was not heated, not even in winter. Meals were eaten in the bedroom. The whole family was suffering from health problems.” All this had led to two of the children dropping out of school. Neither of the two five year olds attended kindergarten.

For almost two years, the SOS Counselling and Support Centre supervised the Ionescu family. “We got access to medical care for the family and supported the parents and children in enrolling the children at school or at kindergarten,” says Dorina. “When the parents asked us to help with kindergarten and school-related purchases, we were able to support them with that too.”

Thanks to the centre’s staff, the children were able to take part in various leisure activities, as well as receive extra tuition in the SOS Centre. The parents were advised on how they could better support their children as they progressed through their school careers. In



the counselling sessions, the staff also discussed other problems within the family and together they searched for solutions. With the help of the counselling centre, the family also successfully applied for and received additional financial support from the state. Mrs Ionescu also attended a course on family planning.

Today, life has stabilised for the Ionescu family. All the children go to school and are achieving average or above-average marks. The two younger children both now attend kindergarten. Mrs Ionescu helps her school-age children to prepare for school and with their homework, and – supported by the SOS Counselling and Support Centre’s social worker – she has started to have talks with her teenage children about contraception and the importance of leading a responsible sexual life. Mr Ionescu has found temporary work and is trying to find a permanent job. Following the provision of financial advice, the family’s budget is now managed more effectively, and the Ionescu family is growing vegetables in their small garden. There is a doctor, who acts as a point of contact for the whole family if they have medical problems, but these have in any case become significantly less frequent. Even the relationship between parents and children has improved. “We are still occasionally in contact with the family,” says Dorina, “but they will soon no longer be in need of our services to make ends meet. That will be the moment at which we can say that we’ve done a good job.”

## ENABLING EDUCATION

SOS Children's Villages is of the firm conviction that through quality education, the cycle of exclusion, poverty, domestic violence and disruption can be broken. In most cases, poverty prevents children from attending school. This is the case in Peraliya, for example. In December 2004, the village, which is located in southern Sri Lanka, suddenly hit the headlines: it was devastated by the tsunami, which caused a train to crash, killing hundreds. The people of Peraliya are poor. They wish for a better life for their children. They know their children should attend school and that a good education is the foundation of a successful future – and yet they send their children out onto the streets so that they can sell things like pens and lighters. Or they make them help their fathers when they are out fishing because the family cannot survive without this additional income. This is where SOS Children's Villages steps in. Since many fathers and young adults suffer from alcohol or drug addiction, and many young people are involved in illegal dealings, SOS Children's Villages tackles these issues and helps with the organisation of self-help groups. These groups manage a

The 242 SOS Kindergartens care for more than 23,000 children. More than 142,000 children and young people receive tuition at an SOS Hermann Gmeiner School, or at an SOS Vocational Training Centre. Training and counselling for children, young people, families and communities is also available in the SOS Social Centres and as part of SOS Family Strengthening Programmes.



## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF OUR WORK: MONITORING, EVALUATING AND LEARNING

SOS Children's Villages needs to constantly reassess whether the approach followed within its work with families of origin has led to the intended results on the lives of children and their families. The SOS Children's Village Programme Policy is therefore a framework for monitoring, evaluating and learning by providing for an external evaluation for each location every three to five years and a self evaluation once a year.

One of the most recent external evaluations was conducted on the work with families of origin in Ethiopia as part of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) funded programs. The impact evaluation highlighted many achievements, such as that almost all children have benefited from educational material support and that young children below the age of six received holistic support services at the daycare centres. It also highlighted areas that need to be improved, such as the economic empowerment of families. In Africa and the Middle East, the ADA-funded family strengthening self-evaluation tool is used for the annual planning process on a program level by monitoring where programmes are in their development and by identifying areas where programmes are doing well or need some improvement. Two key aspects are evaluated during this process: programme services that are provided for children and their families, and organisational support structures and systems. The family strengthening self-evaluation is conducted with the input from child participants, carers, community leaders, service-providing partners and staff members. A global family strengthening database that is flexible enough to accommodate specific continental requirements is currently being piloted and will be rolled out by 2012 in all programmes. It will form an important part of the overall monitoring and evaluation system for the work with families of origin. It is a supportive tool for programme staff members to effectively manage and process relevant information on programme participants. It also monitors project activities, results and key changes achieved in the lives of children, their families and communities.

budget, financed with the assistance of applicants. The aim of SOS Children's Villages' staff is to contribute to the formation of a local organisation. There, all activities are intended to stabilise families so that they are able to send their children to school.

## ALL SCHOOL LEAVERS FACE A HUGE CHALLENGE

That children in Germany will attend school is a certainty. What is less certain, however, is whether they will manage to complete their education. The district of Moabit in the German capital Berlin is an area with significant social problems. Indeed, Moabit comes in bottom in all key social areas – unemployment, average income, average life expectancy, and crime. In addition, there is a high proportion of migrants, which makes coexistence an explosive issue. An SOS Children's Village was established in the centre of Moabit in 2005. It is a model for future SOS youth and family services thanks to its new conceptual design. All the association's facilities are grouped together under one roof and work together with the district's other local charitable associations. Their primary target groups are immigrant children and families, and the staff therefore provide services in several languages. Among the services that SOS Children's Villages Berlin provides are a kindergarten, a family meeting point, educational and family counselling, as well as an after-school club and two common rooms with connections to youth workers at two state schools. Ayshe is eight years old and attends one of these schools – and the common room, “there's always someone to help me, and in my own language too,” she says, “for example, when I'm not getting on with my maths very well, or if I have a fall-





ing out.” Here, Ayshe is describing what the junior common rooms offer: support in everyday school life, and with conflicts at school. The related youth counselling is orientated towards students, parents and teachers and aims to identify problems early, and to mutually develop solutions. If it turns out that a child and their family need more support, then contact can be established with, for example, educational and family counselling or other services on offer within the SOS Children’s Village.

The SOS Children’s Villages educational programme in Lusaka in Zambia is wide-ranging. In addition to an SOS Kindergarten, an SOS School and an SOS Vocational Training Centre, the SOS Children’s Village also offers various kinds of counselling. The rationale behind all the activities is the “family development programme”. It is prepared jointly with the families affected and maps out planned activities and goals. Access to education in Lusaka is a big issue, just as it is in Sri Lanka in the example given above. To provide as many children as possible with a quality education, SOS Children’s Villages supports a local school and is helping to develop its quality. A model project, and completely in keeping with SOS Children’s Villages’ educational policies. ❖

1 <http://www.cli-ica.ca/en/about/about-cli/pillars.aspx>

2 These names have been changed for privacy reasons.

3 Education for All – Global Monitoring Report 2010; <http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/GMR/pdf/gmr2010/gmr2010-pr-short.pdf>

4 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2008): International Literacy Statistics: A Review of Concepts, Methodology and Current Data. Montreal/Canada

5 [http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/GRALE/grale\\_en.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/GRALE/grale_en.pdf)

# THE SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIP





## INCOME GENERATION AS A WAY OUT OF POVERTY

An estimated 1.4 billion people, which equates to about 45 per cent of the working population, live below the poverty line despite being in work, says the International Labour Organization<sup>1</sup>. That these families are at risk of neglecting the protection of and care for their children is just one of the consequences of this. As a result, the services SOS Children's Villages provides include measures to help families secure an adequate income.

Reyna was 24 when she found herself pregnant for the second time. She separated from the father before the child was born: “He treated me badly and never supported me”, she says. Reyna lives in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, around 130 kilometres north of the capital city, Managua. SOS Children’s Villages runs a SOS Family Strengthening Programme in Matagalpa, where Reyna asked for help. “My daughter Mereling was just eighteen months old at the time and Eric was only a few months old. If I hadn’t been offered a helping hand I don’t know where I’d be today”, remembers Reyna. First of all, Reyna decided to put her children into the SOS Children’s Villages day-care services. At the SOS Social Centre she received psychological support and was able to work through her experiences. The centre runs courses on cooking and dressmaking and offers bursaries for training in childcare. Reyna was immediately interested and applied for a bursary. Soon she became one of the first mothers to help look after the children at the centre alongside the supervisors, playing and learning with them. “In those six months I didn’t miss a single day – and after that my bursary was even extended by a further three months,” she recounts proudly. Reyna benefited from the training personally in her role as a mother as well as professionally: “I now have a much better understanding of

what raising children involves”, Reyna is convinced. During this time, Reyna met the man who is now her husband, Luis, and with him had her third child, Jeffrey. He too was cared for in the day-care services.

When Reyna found herself unemployed again once her bursary came to an end, she participated in a micro-loan project. “I invested jointly with my husband and we now have a cereal and cocoa business, which we built up with that money. Without that income, we couldn’t survive.” With the proceeds of their small business, Reyna and Luis earn just enough for the family to be able to get by – but they are optimistic about the future. The seed has been sown.

Reyna’s story is typical of many others who have received support from SOS Family Strengthening Programmes. Reyna and her family have managed to make it into the 55 per cent of the working population whose earnings allow them to live above the poverty line.

But according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the state of the global job market might get worse still. The ILO has therefore developed a Global Jobs Pact,





which is intended to create decent work and prevent a global jobs crisis. Elements of the Pact include:

- › ensuring that companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, have access to credit;
- › employment programmes, especially in developing countries, such as agricultural and environmental projects;
- › Combating youth unemployment by providing vocational and technical training and entrepreneurial skills development;
- › Increased investment in rural areas, in agriculture, infrastructure, health and education.

### ORGANIC FARMING AS A MEANS OF COMBATING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The Farming Livelihood and Improvement Programme set up by SOS Children's Villages Ghana in April 2009 takes a similar approach. The programme was set up in collaboration with the national authorities and other NGOs and initiatives, and is targeted at young people in rural areas in particular, but also works with families so that they are better equipped to meet the development needs of their children, and can send their children to school. Children are not only encouraged to complete their basic education, they can also take part in extra-curricular courses. This way they can acquire the skills needed for organic farming as well as life skills. The aim is to equip them with the motivation, knowledge and skills required for working in the rural sector.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

According to the International Labour Organization<sup>2</sup>, there were 212 million people unemployed in 2009 – 34 million more than in 2007. According to the ILO report *Global Employment Trends*<sup>3</sup>, up to 50 million jobs have been lost worldwide as a result of the financial and economic crisis. Work without social insurance might also increase.

Fewer new jobs were created than in any year since 1991, according to ILO. The number of jobs did not increase by more than one per cent, but 45 million young people entered the jobs market. Around half of the working population has to get by on about two US dollars a day to support themselves and their family. Up to 200 million more workers are now at risk of having to survive on less than two US dollars a day. Young people are particularly badly affected by the state of the jobs market, emphasises ILO-

## IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

### – FAMILY STRENGTHENING IN POTOSÍ, BOLIVIA

The last census in Bolivia (INE, 2003) revealed that 80 per cent of the approximately 170,000 inhabitants of the southern Bolivian city of Potosí live in poverty and 36 per cent live below the poverty line. Infant mortality in Potosí, at 99 deaths per 1,000 live births, is the highest in the country, as is the proportion of children under three who are chronically malnourished. It is common to see children begging or working. Potosí is a city that lies 4,000 metres above sea-level, and that in 1545 was referred to as one of the richest cities in the world: it was said that Potosí had enough riches to build a bridge of silver reaching all the way to Spain. Today, mining or informal businesses are the only way of earning a living. Many of the families who are financially dependent on work in the mines are affected by tuberculosis; the disease is responsible for many deaths among the fathers who are the heads of household.

It is against this background that SOS Children's Village Potosí supports a total of 860 families, caring for around 1,100 children. Income generation for participants is a focus of the activities. Vocational, specialist and personal training is intended to teach them to provide for themselves and to overcome critical situations together with their families. For example, the "solidarity and productivity

micro-credit" project was introduced, which grew out of a collaboration with an organisation called Trickle Up. After evaluating the positive effects of the programme, Trickle Up provided 50,000 US dollars to ensure the sustainability of the micro-credit project – money that gave many mothers and couples the opportunity to set up small businesses, such as small shops or skilled craft businesses.



Another key feature of the SOS Family Strengthening Programmes is working with communities as a means of ensuring sustainability. For example, if the responsibility is shared, then the neighbourhood associations, through family committees, take into account the needs of the children and families when drawing up their annual plans. The leaders of the family committees and neighbourhood associations meet annually to exchange experiences, analyse them and seek out

solutions to problems, in order to assess the development of the programme in the individual communities. This strengthens the programme's community-based approach, especially as the cooperation between the SOS Family Strengthening Programme and the leaders of the neighbourhood associations and family committees is set out in a shared responsibility agreement between the three parties.

On leaving school, young people are provided with start-up support to help them cope with the transition to work, and create sustainable livelihoods in the agricultural sector. This in turn increases the number of more skilled and productive young people in the labour force, thereby contributing to the local rural economy, promoting local agricultural development, and improving food security for the entire community.

The project is based on a participatory approach. Families and communities are empowered to take charge of their own development and that of their children, and are provided with access to the necessary knowledge and skills. Existing community structures are strengthened, so that the benefits of the project are maintained after its completion. Investing in the local partnering NGOs boosts their ability to manage not only this project, but future ones as well. The dissemination of best practices helps to expand or even repeat projects.

The programme's integrated approach, incorporating the expertise of socio-economic community development and organic agricultural development has created a positive synergy: it allows us to address the problems faced by children and young people within their communities while at the same time encouraging their potential.

The greatest achievement has been the overwhelming enthusiasm of the communities in implementing the programme. The programme has received massive support from community leaders, opinion makers, children and young people, especially with regard to the organic agricultural elements. The positive response and willingness to cooperate stems from the inclusion of community members in the planning and management of the project, as well as the fact that the programme responds to the needs they identified and enhances the opportunities available to them within their own communities.

Attendance levels in the programme's activities are high, and the actively supportive role of community-based organisations in implementing the programme clearly illustrates the high degree of community participation. ❖

1 ILO-Nachrichten 2/2009 (available in German)

2 [http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1330&Itemid=368](http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1330&Itemid=368)

3 International Labour Organization (2010):  
Global Employment Trends.  
Geneva/Switzerland

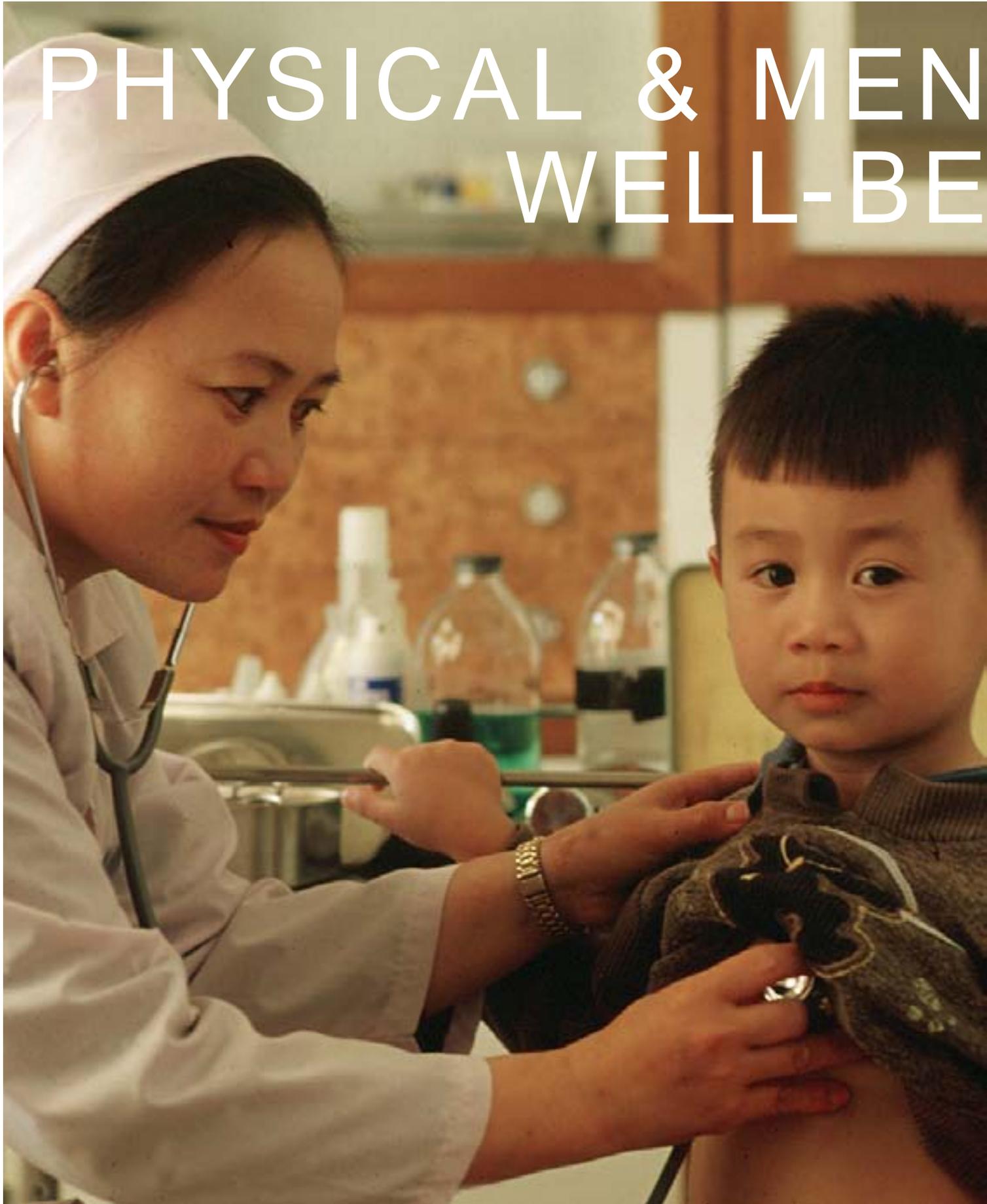
## SELF HELP GROUPS – THE INDIAN WAY

They are the poorest of the poor, the Mahadalit caste, which used to be known as "the untouchables". When floods laid waste to the Indian Federal State of Bihar in August 2008, it was above all the Mahadalit whose already humble existence was threatened. Working with the authorities, SOS Children's Villages helped to organise self-help groups. Six such groups were formed. With the support of SOS Children's Villages staff members and help from the government and a local bank, a loan administration system was set up, with repayment conditions that allowed the Mahadalit to start up businesses. For many, it was the first time they had been into a bank – a step into the working world that had previously been denied to many of them.



The „Sopan“ self-help group was particularly successful. “We started growing and selling spices, at first mostly to a State childcare service”, recounts Sunita, one of the participants, proudly. “Today we supply several schools in the area and even offer take away meals!” Women are especially active in the Sopan group. Their self-confidence has grown: their businesses are doing well and a life of financial independence is within reach”.

# PHYSICAL & MENTAL WELL-BEING



# TAL ING

Every hour of every day, more than 1,000 children under the age of five die.<sup>1</sup> The mortality rate is at its highest in the first five months of life, with premature births, infectious diseases, pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria and HIV among the most common causes of death. A further negative factor is malnutrition, which is the cause of more than a third of deaths in young children. SOS Children's Villages reacts to these problems by providing a wide range of solutions.

**A** word on HIV/AIDS: according to estimates, over 14 million children<sup>2</sup> worldwide have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Many of them cannot go to school, and have little food and clothing. They may be suffering from anxiety or depression, and are more exposed to the risk of abuse. SOS Children's Villages, as a global organisation which campaigns for the protection and support of children who do not enjoy adequate parental care, started to focus attention on dealing with HIV/AIDS in the 1990s as part of its mandate in response to this situation. Since 2002, SOS Children's Villages has been setting up dedicated programmes for the support of children affected by HIV/AIDS. As a result, support programmes have developed in most countries in southern Africa, aimed at children living with chronically ill parents, those who have lost one or both parents, or children who share their homes with orphans. The year 2008 also saw the adoption of the global HIV/AIDS Policy "Joining in the fight against HIV and AIDS". It describes the position of SOS Children's Villages on the topic and sets out a framework for action.

## SOUND NUTRITION FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

No fewer than three of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals relate to the problem of malnutrition. It is also the issue which SOS Children's Village Samneua in Laos wants to tackle as part of the SOS Family Strengthening Programme.

Studies carried out locally have shown in particular that the children of the ethnic groups living in the forests of Laos's mountains suffer from severe malnutrition and consequently, the mortality rate of infants is extremely high. Together with the authorities, SOS Children's Villages decided in 2003 to launch a project. The goal of the project is to see that the children are better cared for, and to create awareness among families and communities as to what the consequences of malnutrition are, and what options for prevention are available and within easy grasp for families.

## KENYA – LIVING A FULL LIFE DESPITE HIV/AIDS

In Kenya's capital Nairobi, HIV/AIDS is the main reason why children cannot experience the protection and care of a family. Most children have either lost both their parents, or live in households with severely ill or dying parents. Hand in hand with this situation go problems such as poverty, dropping out of school and the pressure to contribute to the family's income.

SOS Children's Villages therefore takes on the task of identifying the most vulnerable children and giving them access to facilities which will allow them to experience a fulfilling and healthy upbringing. Families are supported so that they are able to protect and look after their children better. The development, planning, implementation and review of all projects takes place jointly with leaders and volunteers from the community, who are involved in all decisions, and regular meetings ensure that their point of view is reflected in the scope of the projects. On the one hand, this means that the need for participation is satisfied, on the other hand it also serves to ensure sustainability. Identifying and strengthening organisational, financial, economic, technical and political resources is a particular concern of SOS Children's Villages as it means that local partners will be able to take the projects over, to continue them, or to implement similar projects elsewhere.

There are many facilities available for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS. For example, children and their families receive psychosocial support in group meetings and workshops, so they may

SOS Children's Villages adapted two family houses to accommodate such children, and developed a nutrition programme on the basis of the region's available resources. The programme aims to provide the children with food for a period of between three and nine months. It is aimed at children aged between one and three whose parents do not have the means to provide them with adequate nutrition. To identify the children who fall into this category, SOS Children's Villages works closely with local authorities. Dao Huong is the village director of SOS Children's Village Samneua. During site visits, he and the authorities make the decision as to which children would be accepted into the programme. If the family agrees, they sign an agreement which establishes how the child will be provided for, and how long it will be until the child is returned to the family. "This agreement," explains Dao Huong, "is supposed to indicate clearly to the families that they are still responsible for their children. Agreements like this are important for the prevention of child trafficking." Nevertheless, some families were initially suspicious. According to Dao Huong, "some parents



cope better with the stresses and strains related to living with HIV/AIDS. Things like children's rights, hygiene, and how everyone can take responsibility are also discussed, and there are games and craft activities in order to allow the families to forget about their daily struggle for survival for a while. Parents and guardians may obtain advice or find out about legal issues. Cooking, baking, carpentry, hairdressing and driving courses are also offered for the adults, in order to provide them with skills which will help them to find work.

As far as medical care is concerned, the SOS Medical Centre is an important asset, and provides basic medical care, vaccinations, AIDS tests and consultations, and cares for pregnant women and young mothers. The overall objective of all the activities is to equip the community with the skills to develop measures to protect themselves and care for their vulnerable children.



suspected SOS Children's Villages of stealing their children's blood, or viewed the vaccination programmes as unnatural. But we were able to overcome these reservations." And so the first group of children arrived at the houses in 2003, where they were met by two trained family assistants.

First, the children must be de-wormed. They receive healthy, nourishing food, vitamin tablets and are vaccinated against various diseases. During this time many children struggle with stomach problems, a consequence of the worms, but also of the unusual food. Others become ill simply because of overeating. Usually it takes a few weeks until the children have become accustomed to eating a balanced diet. SOS Children's Villages also teaches the children basic hygiene.

Parents are free to visit their children. But that is not always easy, since some settlements are located up to 200 kilometres away, and the roads are bad. "I've been walking since this morning", says one mother, "but I wanted to visit my son to see how he is."

SOS Children's Villages continues to keep an eye on the children's development for another year following their return to their families. The SOS Children's Village staff explain to the families important aspects of hygiene and how to prepare good, nutritious food. As a temporary measure, families with very little income may also receive financial support.

"Today," village director Dao Huong reports, "the people in the villages welcome us with open arms: it's plain to see how well the children who have participated in the programmes

## THE HIV/AIDS POLICY AT A GLANCE

In the fight against HIV and AIDS, SOS Children's Villages works together with children and young people, local communities, other NGOs and governments. AIDS is a preventable disease and, therefore, education is the key.

One step is to ensure that children and young people have access to age-appropriate information and education which allows them to choose a lifestyle which will protect them from the possibility of being infected with HIV.

Today, living with AIDS does not necessarily equal a death sentence. By receiving the appropriate medical, financial and psychosocial support, it is possible for people who are HIV positive or living with AIDS to lead very "positive" lives. Anyone could be infected or affected, and therefore every effort is made to actively oppose the stigmatisation and exclusion of people solely on the grounds of their HIV status. SOS Children's Villages is supporting children, families, communities and governments to take joint responsibility for ensuring that AIDS will soon become a thing of the past.

have developed, and those children rarely fall ill.” Currently, almost 500 children have benefited from the programme. And, according to follow-up evaluations, with just a few exceptions, all are enjoying good health. The authorities now see SOS Children’s Villages as a reliable ally which has the ability to tackle problems.

Now that this project has been running for seven years, SOS Children’s Villages has learnt that in order to achieve the greatest results, it’s crucial to reach children when they are under two years old. It’s not the access to food which is most urgent at this age, but conveying to mothers which rules should apply during pregnancy, such as how infants must be fed, the importance of breastfeeding, and how to make the transition to other foods. Together with partners in the communities, SOS Children’s Villages is currently working on long-term action plans in order for lasting results to be achieved.

### GIVING RESPONSIBILITY BACK TO FAMILIES

Healthy eating is one of the priorities of the SOS Social Centre in Uruguay’s second largest city, Salto, which has



## A SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

During its evaluations, UN-HABITAT, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, granted the status of “Good Practice” to the SOS Family Strengthening Programme in Salto/Uruguay. This classed it a project which can serve a model to others in terms of sustainability, participation and networking.

The examples chosen will be added to UN-HABITAT’s database, established in 1996, which is available for partners to use. In a global network, this is how the aspects of projects which provide valuable impetus for similar projects in sustainable aid and development can be spread.

been up and running since 2005. It now also includes what are known as the “Centros Comunitarios” – community centres which were launched in several districts of Salto. The SOS Family Strengthening Programmes support those families who live on the city’s outskirts in hazardous conditions, where children are exposed to the highest risks. The five community centres reach around 500 children and their families. There is a nursery, meals, and medical care for the children, which allows women access to the labour market. Common to all the centres is the families’ active participation: mothers support teachers in their daily work, prepare meals, or sign up as cleaners. Fathers, uncles and grandfathers repair windows and toys, mow the grass and maintain the buildings.

The family committees are normally made up of an average of 15 families, and over the last five years, they have taken on more and more responsibility. They have become a mouthpiece for the families, and organise workshops and lectures on personal and professional development, and further training. One of the family committees’ most important tasks is that of strengthening the rights of the children. The committees also run campaigns within the city’s various districts, organise information sessions, and provide support for families by holding individual talks.

The building which houses the SOS Social Centre also contains a health centre where the children receive medical and dental treatment once a week, and where they are regularly weighed and vaccinated. The facilities at local public health centres are available for participants of the programme in the municipal centres as well. Through successful cooperation between the municipal centres and these clinics, the same weekly medical check-up is also ensured for the children belonging to the municipal centres.

The centres also coordinate the cooperation of the city’s health centres with other facilities such as the Centre for Early Intervention, schools for children with disabilities, and a centre for premature babies. It is also important to provide support to families in terms of contact with specialist doctors, since a visit to a specialist can pose major problems. Among other things, a numbering system is in operation, which means the state will only pay for a certain number of specialist visits. Here, the support of the centres’ staff is crucial, both for coordinating, and motivating the mothers, to make them realise how important it is to continue to have their children treated by experts, and, for that to happen, it is necessary to make the effort.

## ALL CHILDREN NEED ROUTINE

The eight hours' day care provided by the nursery in Salto is full of routine, something which gives children security and confidence. After they are welcomed in the morning, there is breakfast together, games and pre-school lessons, then lunch, after which the children brush their teeth, have a nap, engage in outdoor activities and then have an afternoon meal together. One of the nursery's aims is to improve the state of the children's nutrition, and to cover 80% of their daily requirement in the breakfast, lunch and snack provided. In addition, the families are taught about sound nutrition through discussions, cooking sessions, workshops and presentations. Experts on nutrition present the families with healthy and affordable food, and supply them with recipes.

Once a week, the children work together in groups in order to promote psychomotor development, and to improve their bodily awareness and their ability to communicate with the outside world. It is important to the staff that the families are involved in matters concerning bringing up children. Evaluations are made on a quarterly basis, according to the Abbreviated Development Scale of Nelson Ortiz – and the results show that the programme is a success. ❖



## COMPREHENSIVE MEDICAL AND PSYCHSOCIAL CARE

Where required in underdeveloped areas, SOS Children's Villages builds medical centres which specialise mainly in the care of children and women in the catchment area of its villages. Today, 68 SOS Medical Centres offer basic health care in the form of vaccinations, maternity wards, advice on hygiene, nutrition and first aid, information on HIV/AIDS and their prevention, and psychosocial services. Another aspect is the psychological, social and mental health or the medical therapeutic support of children and young people which SOS Children's Villages offers as part of its various programmes.

## FACTS AND FIGURES<sup>3</sup>

Worldwide, around 20 million children under five are severely malnourished and are therefore particularly at risk of dying in childhood. A World Bank<sup>4</sup> study has shown that the window to avoid the consequences of malnutrition in children is small, and spans only the period between the mother's pregnancy and the child's second birthday. Damage in terms of growth and brain development during this time are especially serious and largely irreversible.

Twenty-two million children have no access to routine vaccinations. Diarrhoea and pneumonia are the most common causes of death among children, with three quarters of cases occurring in just 15 countries. Two thirds of children's deaths could be prevented by taking simple, inexpensive measures.

1 <http://www.who.int/features/qa/13/en/index.html>

2 Children and AIDS: Fourth Stocktaking Report, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UNFPA, 2009

3 <http://www.who.int/features/qa/13/en/index.html>, <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/sowc/>, [www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)

4 Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development, Washington, DC/USA, World Bank, 2006

# EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

# A





There are disadvantaged women and girls all over the world. The main reason for this is the rigid gender roles which persist in many parts of the world. SOS Children's Villages is a great advocate of empowerment – a buzz word symbolising the liberation and strengthening of girls and women.

“Some other chefs and I would like to offer a catering service,” Naima, mother of three, who lost her livelihood when her husband left her, eagerly says. “It would help the community, and it would mean that we could become financially independent.” Naima was one of the first to have the chance to take part in a cookery course at the SOS Social Centre in Sidi Bernoussi in Morocco, and it was there that she discovered her passion for catering.

Naima represents many women who slip into poverty when their husband or partner dies or leaves them. Because of their rigidly defined roles in many parts of the world, women have often not been educated and therefore have no access to a regular income. The result is that they are also often unable to look after their children when their husbands are no longer in the picture.

Poverty carries additional disadvantages for girls and women. According to a UN Report on developing countries, girls from the poorest 60% of households are three times more likely to drop out of primary school than girls from wealthier households. The situation in secondary schools is even worse. The reasons for this are poverty, child labour, early marriage and pregnancy, as well as discrimination within the family and at school. Many girls leave school early because they are married off early. In rural areas where there are very few schools, parents do not send their daughters to school because the journey to school is too dangerous, or because school is too expensive. Education is made possible for the sons of the family first.



## MOROCCO

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### – FOCUS ON SINGLE MOTHERS

In Sidi Bernoussi in Morocco, there is a focus on single mothers, who are able to make use of additional services such as rent allowances, baby milk and counselling. Because of the stigma surrounding single mothers, they usually have more problems integrating into society and building up a network of contacts. They tend to withdraw in order to remain as anonymous as possible. Family carers devote more of their time to them and visit the mothers and their children at home or at work, to see them through their development. Currently, approximately 50 women and 100 children benefit from the service.

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Studies clearly show that for girls, education is the key to independent living, and gives them the chance to break away from dependency. With an education, women can earn a better income and be more involved in social decisions.

### PROMOTING RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

Through its work with families, SOS Children’s Villages tries to put the processes of change in motion and support sustainable development in relation to gender equality. In countries all over the world, they work to ensure that boys and girls enjoy equal access to schools, training courses, housing, state and legal services, and medical care. “Equal rights and equal opportunities for all is one of our goals,” says a carer in the family centre of Mostar in Bosnia. “Through targeted information and training for young people, women and entire families, we try to raise awareness of human rights, children’s rights and gender roles. The aim is to promote understanding and mutual respect.”

Over the last six months, around 150 adults and 200 children took part in various activities, ranging from counselling for families, workshops on topics such as gender, violence

prevention, children's rights and working through trauma, through to parties and trips. Examples include a workshop on relationships and roles for young people, or workshops on women's rights, and the number of workshop participants is increasing. But home visits are also used to draw attention to the importance of the equal distribution of tasks in the home.

## EMPOWERMENT

In Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, SOS Children's Villages is working to empower girls and women. The women are often economically and socially dependent on their male partners, and alienated by discrimination. In the four Ethiopian SOS Family Strengthening Programmes, more than 90% of the families supported are comprised of single mothers and their children. They get the opportunity to begin or continue training and are supported in starting a project on income generation so that they may live independent and self-determined lives. Courses covering the issues of violence against women and harmful cultural practices such as the marriage or genital mutilation of girls are also included in the SOS Family Strengthening Programme. "I'm so glad my son was taken into the day-care centre – I don't have to worry about him eating properly or his schooling anymore," explains a mother about her experiences. "Before, my son and I couldn't even afford one meal a day and we had to rely on our neighbours. I then worked for a little while as a cleaner in a nightclub, but I had to take my son with me. When he got hungry, he screamed and prevented me from doing my work. I didn't feel comfortable in those surroundings and was called a prostitute by the boy's father. With the loan from SOS Children's Villages, I have been able to open a small clothes shop in the city. I have a steady income and even rent a house for me and my son."

The Simba Project in Belgium also serves to strengthen the skills of mothers and children. If, due to family crises such as violence or neglect, the health and safety of children in the family is no longer ensured, children aged up to six months can be housed with a maximum of eight other children. The parents consent to the residential care and retain their parental responsibility. There are also family therapy sessions which run alongside the programme in order to highlight the relationship between the mother, and the whole family, and the child. The aim is to devote time to finding a new way of living together for the future. Various activities and trips help to open up new perspectives. When it is time for the children to go home, they first make short visits to prepare for their return, and thereafter are closely monitored by social workers.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

Today, more than a billion people – the majority of whom are female – are living in inhumane conditions. According to a UNESCO press release, around 72 million children did not go to primary school and even if the registration rate has increased significantly in almost all regions of the world over the last 40 years, today, there are still fewer girls than boys who go to school. An article by UNICEF shows that education for girls can have the greatest impact, since:

- the statistical risk of dying during pregnancy or childbirth is significantly lower for women with a school education;
- the higher the education level of the mother, the lower the rate of infant and child mortality – each year of school the mother completes reduces mortality by 10%;
- educated women usually do everything to see that their children can go to school as well;
- education slows population growth – women with an education tend to marry later and have fewer children;
- the higher the level of education of a woman, the more influence she has on her plans for the future and the less she will allow herself to be exploited and suppressed;
- women with an education participate more frequently in political and economic decisions at local, regional and national levels.

## GUATEMALA: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In Sololá in Guatemala SOS Children's Villages supports around 350 children in 240 families, 92% of which are represented by women. Guidance on the topics of boys and girls, women, family and community is provided.

In the city of Sololá, the programme has been developed according to the cultural and social background of the three coexisting Mayan communities. The women from the three communities are discriminated against in several ways: because they are women, because they belong to a particular ethnic group, and because they are poor. Women from these ethnic groups have been prepared for their future roles in the household practically from birth. They must learn what housework there is to be done, and they do not go to school, or if they do, they will only go for two years of primary school. This leaves the majority of them illiterate.

Another characteristic of the women is the average number of children they will have – an average of five children each. However, due to the fact that they are already sexually mature and sexually active by the age of twelve, there have been cases of women bearing up to twelve children. These circumstances have prevented women from the Mayan communities taking a greater role in public life, for example in communities where positions of authority are consistently held by men.

The SOS Children's Villages literacy programme in Sololá empowers women and helps them develop skills, particularly in relation to traditional gender roles, human rights, self-esteem, sexual health and reproduction. This has meant that women are increasingly being considered for participation in public tasks and decision-making at the community level, for example the councils for community development – COCODE – the main tool for the participation of all population groups in public administration.

Dolores Escún, participant in the programme and member of the council for community development COCODE is convinced that, "by empowering women, we will be able to have a part in power".

## SCHOOL AS A BASIS

SOS Children's Villages is committed to the global achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, one of the objectives of which is the equality of women in relation to primary and secondary education. "Gradually, parents and carers of children are coming round to the idea that education is a priority", a carer from the SOS Family Strengthening Programme in Bahir, India tells us. This rural area suffers from extreme poverty, reinforced by the patriarchal caste system in India and the low status of women. SOS Children's Villages focuses on customised programmes for families which include education, health care and psychosocial support. The basis for everything, however, is education. So 293 children who have never been to school are now being prepared for regular school in special learning centres. The children are provided with regular meals to combat malnutrition. A further 800 children are assisted in attending regular school in Bahir, and 40 young people receive vocational training. ❖



1 The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, United Nations, New York, 2010.

2 Apartheid der Geschlechter. Menschenrechtsverletzungen an Mädchen und Frauen: UNICEF Austria, 2006



# FAMILY STRENGTHENING

## – WHAT SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES DOES TO HELP

When living conditions are difficult, or during crises, parents often find it simply impossible to care for their children appropriately. Many parents lack basic necessities – money to pay the doctor or the school, or perhaps strength, health, and faith in the future. The SOS family strengthening activities are designed to enable families to support themselves in the long-term and cope with life independently.

SOS Children's Villages is convinced that it is almost always best for children to grow up in families. Millions of children across the world have already lost the protection of their families. Poverty, disease, violence, natural disasters and armed conflicts mean that every day there are more children who at risk of being abandoned, neglected and/or abused.

SOS Children's Villages works with the communities concerned and with local partners to support disadvantaged families across the world. SOS Children's Villages also aims at sensitising decision-makers to the concerns that these children face and influencing them to make changes in policies and practices that undermine the well-being of children without parental care.

SOS Family Strengthening Programmes are aimed, according to local circumstances, at special target groups such as single mothers, families that have been affected by HIV/AIDS or families with financial problems that are often linked to addiction, illness and exclusion.

When necessary and when it is deemed to be in the child's best interests, there is the option for children to grow up in foster families or in an SOS Children's Villages family,

where children are supported, protected and cared for in a loving home.

SOS Children's Villages was founded in Austria in 1949 and now operates in 132 countries and territories around the world. SOS Children's Villages builds families for children in need, helps them shape their own futures and shares in the development of their communities. SOS Children's Villages' family strengthening activities reach about 300,000 people. ❖

We believe that children's development is best realised:

- ▶ in a caring family environment...
- ▶ supported by strong social networks...
- ▶ basing all decisions and actions on the best interests of the child...
- ▶ involving children in finding solutions to challenges they face in their lives...



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 Cameroon  
 Canada  
 Cape Verde  
 Central African Republic  
 Chad  
 Chile  
 China  
 Colombia  
 Democratic Republic of the Congo  
 Costa Rica  
 Côte d'Ivoire  
 Croatia  
 Czech Republic

Denmark  
 Dominican Republic  
 Ecuador  
 Egypt  
 El Salvador  
 Equatorial Guinea  
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