

# World AIDS Orphans Day: An untapped opportunity

Submitted by [godsway](#) about 4 days ago

[World AIDS Orphans Day](#), observed May 7 each year, is dedicated to raising awareness of issues affecting millions of children orphaned by AIDS. But not so many people are aware of this grassroots campaign meant to draw attention to, and to advocate on behalf of, AIDS orphans.

The experiences of this writer in southern Africa, where almost every family is caring, supporting and offering protection to children affected by AIDS, show that not many people are even aware of this event.

Unlike [World AIDS Day](#) and [World TB Day](#) that have received the hype that they deserve, World AIDS Orphans Day is a forgotten event, yet behind the silence, there are millions of children suffering as a result of HIV/AIDS.

The urgency of the matter is clear. More than [15 million children](#) under 18 have been orphaned as a result of AIDS. Around [11.6 million](#) of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa.

AIDS orphans suffer emotional trauma at the loss of their parents, lack access to basic necessities such as shelter, food, clothing, health and education and are often stigmatised by society through association with AIDS.

The response to issues affecting these children continues to fall short of what it should achieve. It has taken much longer for paediatric versions of antiretroviral drugs to be made available than adult formulations. That was largely due to the hypocrisy and profit-driven nature of pharmaceutical companies that saw little value in developing products specifically to treat children in low and middle income countries.

According to [Medecins Sans Frontieres](#) (MSF), successful measures to prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) in wealthy nations meant that only a small number of children were infected with HIV. Paediatric HIV was largely a problem of poor countries and there was no incentive to offer to the profit-driven pharmaceutical industry. Even when paediatric versions of the drugs were made, they were considerably more expensive than the drugs designed for adults.

UNAIDS estimates that [2.1 million children](#) are living with HIV/AIDS, 90 per cent of whom are from sub-Saharan Africa. [Only 10 per cent](#) receive any treatment for the disease.

It is obviously clear that the government, civil society and everyday citizens need to use opportunities such as World AIDS Orphans Day to advocate for issues affecting orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs).

There is an urgent need to continue working towards the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV as well as attending to the needs of children currently living with HIV.

Successes scored by events such as World AIDS Day show that social mobilization centred on key dates can bring people together and raise awareness of a particular issue and hold leaders accountable. World AIDS Orphans Day is clearly another untapped opportunity that can be utilized to demand evidence based action to issues affecting OVCs.

World AIDS Orphans Day was founded by [Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights \(FXB\) in 2002](#). Since then, thousands of people have celebrated this event in more than 20 countries.