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Acting against inaction

Every 15 seconds a child somewhere is orphaned by Aids. But we cannot let the scale of the crisis paralyse our will to do something about it

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It is a truth universally ignored, that every 15 seconds somewhere in the world, a child is orphaned by [Aids](#). By 2010, the pandemic could rob as many as 25 million children of at least one of their parents.

Both these figures - the first put out by [Unaid](#)s, the second by [AFXB](#), the world's pre-eminent NGO for orphans affected by the epidemic - are staggering. So it comes as a surprise to learn that children lost to Aids remain part of the hidden backdrop to the health crisis.

All too often, it is orphans who have remained the invisible victims of a virus now decimating entire communities in countries such as India, China and Russia.

Young people aged between 15 and 24, comprise 50% of the world's new HIV infections, according to [Unicef](#) ([pdf](#)).

Denial, borne of ignorance and taboo, is partly to blame for this sorry state of affairs, as I witnessed during a trip to India where infection rates are now among the highest in the world.

From the tiniest village to mega cities like Mumbai, the disease has infiltrated households so insidiously - striking women in particular - that over 90% of carriers have no idea that they are even HIV-positive.

When it comes to orphans, the logic also seems to be that there are so many of these lost children (15 million if you believe conservative estimates), it doesn't bear thinking about. Remarkable, this, when the dramatic growth of children orphaned by Aids was always bound to become a major economic, social and security issue, with abundant evidence that many have already been drawn into sexual trafficking, criminal gangs and armies of child soldiers in the developing world.

But rather than overstate the problem, repeated studies appear only to have understated the impact of the disease on children. Even in countries where the spread of HIV has stabilised or declined, the number of orphans continues to rise due to the time lag between when parents become infected and when they die.

Not that there is ever much mention of this. Tellingly, Indian authorities have yet to come up with a figure for Aids orphans, even though more of its citizens are thought to have been infected with the Aids virus than in any other country.

Experts say because the scale of the problem is so immense, it seems to give many an excuse for inaction.

[World Aids Orphans Day](#), marking its seventh year today, was instigated precisely to reverse such trenchant denial. Inaugurated by FXB and its French founder, Albina du Boisrouvray, the event aims to highlight a global humanitarian problem that has been addressed by none but the very few.

Because Aids orphans face profound economic and emotional despair, and have no means of making themselves heard, such advocacy is immeasurable.

Du Boisrouvray hopes the event will not only raise awareness about Aids orphans and their economic and social exclusion, but ultimately help reintegrate them back into society. More than ever, she says, western governments need to allocate more of overall Aids funding to orphans.

Despite the best efforts of the global medical fraternity, HIV continues to outwit us all.

The consequences of ignoring the plight of Aids orphans are simply too ominous to ignore.

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