

Review of the COPE II and OVC Programs in Malawi

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CAC	Community AIDS Committee
CHIN	children in need
COPE	Community-Based Options for Protection and Empowerment project
DACC	District AIDS Coordinating Committee
DCOF	Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
FINCA	Foundation for International Community Assistance
HBC	home-based care
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
LIFE	Local Income and Food Enhancement
MP	Member of Parliament
NAC	National AIDS Committee
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children program
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
SC/US	Save the Children Federation, Inc., of the United States
VAC	Village AIDS Committee
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	U. S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

1. An estimated 1.2 million or 27 percent of Malawian children will be orphaned by the year 2000 (*Children on the Brink*, 1997).
2. The premature death of their parents places these children at high risk of descending into relative poverty, discontinuing their education, and experiencing threats to their physical health and psychological well-being.
3. **The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF)-funded and SC/US-implemented Community-Based Options for Protection and Empowerment (COPE) program is a relatively low-cost community mobilization program to mitigate the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the lives and general welfare of children and families made vulnerable by the epidemic.**
4. The structure of the District AIDS Coordinating Committees (DACC), Community AIDS Committees (CAC), and Village AIDS Committees (VAC), with its technical subcommittees—orphans, home-based care, youth, and high-risk groups—is a good model. If effectively implemented, this model has the potential to provide a package of services needed by HIV/AIDS-affected families at an individual household level, as well as by the community at large.
5. USAID/DCOF funded the initial COPE I program from July 1995 through September 1997, and provided a second grant (COPE II) for the period September 1997 through September 2000. DCOF has conducted three evaluations of this program: in 1996, 1998, and 1999.

Following is a summary of the main issues examined during this evaluation.

Programmatic Issues

1. There is an urgent need for SC/US/COPE to establish a systematic phasing-down/phasing-out strategy from the districts where they have activities before the program is introduced into new districts. COPE could also consider phasing out or phasing down during the time of the year when communities are less vulnerable, i.e., during the harvesting season.
2. Baseline surveys and comprehensive and systematic resource mapping and needs assessments of vulnerable children, orphans, and caregiving families in COPE-participating communities

are essential to assess the impact of the program on the targeted population. Thus, indicators need to be developed and evaluations built into the program implementation strategy.

3. The DACC/CAC/VAC structure needs further in-depth examination to determine the DACC's capacity to reach VACs with viable services. COPE should assess its experience in Dedza with a view toward lessons learned that may be relevant to the scaling up of the community mobilization process.
4. It is vitally important that household resources be strengthened. Microcredit appears to offer a good possibility for such strengthening. In this respect, COPE needs to liaise with the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) to ensure that there is a geographical overlap between COPE-participating communities and those where FINCA is planning to introduce group loans.
5. Access to microcredit, agricultural credit and inputs, and commercial credit at the community level is crucial for the economic/financial security of the participating communities. These are poor communities that need intensive support for an extended period of time to grasp business concepts and put them to use. COPE should carefully examine this component of the program and formulate a concrete strategy to deal with these communities' limited ability to generate extra resources for the support and care of orphans and other vulnerable children in their midst.
6. There is a need to assist the communities, especially VACs, in raising funds in a general sense, rather than relying entirely on contributions from the technical subcommittee members. For instance, the subcommittees could mobilize the communities as a whole to raise funds. The subcommittees could also look to outsiders such as the business community, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and religious organizations to contribute not only cash but materials.
7. The DACC's coordinating role with the CACs and VACs should be enhanced by providing them with means of transportation, e.g., a COPE vehicle that would service the DACCs, and bicycles for the CACs and VACs.

Policy Issues

1. Because the DACCs and CACS are part of the government-mandated structure and the VACs are not, it might be necessary for COPE to advocate at the highest governmental level possible to have the VACs and their orphans activities incorporated more fully into the National AIDS Committee (NAC) structure and into NAC's national agenda than is currently the case.

2. The benefits of the COPE program should be demonstrated to the government so that the government can contribute to the program and/or ask the donor community to get involved in COPE programs around the country. COPE needs to be seen as a government project/initiative and not as SC/US business.
3. The Government of Malawi needs to be more fully committed to the community mobilization approach from the village level up. COPE should work to build awareness, understanding, consensus, and support for community mobilization among key governmental and NGO stakeholders.
4. Liaison and collaboration with UN agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is critical, especially in areas where the programs overlap. Sharing experiences, resources, and expertise can maximize the benefits to the communities.

Summary of Key Recommendations for COPE II

Programmatic Issues

1. Establish a systematic phasing-down/out strategy from participating districts, e.g., a two-year plan that includes intensive first-year involvement of SC/US/COPE staff in a district, and a second year of gradual but systematic disengagement.
2. Enhance the coordinating role of the DACCs to supervise the CACs and VACs by providing transportation as well as technical support in the form of skills training.
3. Conduct a detailed examination of the DACC/CAC/VAC structures and the linkages between them, especially the DACC-VAC linkages.
4. Undertake baseline surveys and systematic resource mapping before COPE is introduced into new districts and villages.
5. Liaise with FINCA to ensure geographic overlap between COPE-participating districts and communities where FINCA is offering group loans.
6. Enhance fundraising skills, especially at the CAC and VAC levels.

Save the Children Operational Recommendations

1. Enhance the capacity of COPE II staff by establishing an assistant program coordinator position that is longer-term than the current position, filled by a short-term Peace Corp volunteer.
2. Review the staffing situation of SC/US/COPE II before scaling up to the three new districts.

3. Establish a program of occasional evaluations (i.e., biannually) in which COPE II staff travel to districts where SC/US has phased-out (i.e., Mangochi and Namwera Districts).

Policy Recommendations

1. SC/US could advocate for VAC activities to be incorporated into the NAC structure.
2. SC/US/COPE could build awareness, understanding, consensus, and support for community mobilization among key governmental and NGO stakeholders.
3. Liaison and collaboration with UN agencies such as UNICEF, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and UNDP is critical for resource sharing, best practices, experience sharing, and complementarity.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS EVALUATION

Background

From January 8 to 24, 1999, a three-person team visited Zambia and Malawi to review the Orphans and Vulnerable children (OVC) and the Community-Based Options for Protection and Empowerment (COPE) II programs respectively. These two programs, funded by the U. S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), are aimed at addressing the needs of orphans and other vulnerable children and families affected by HIV/AIDS in their own communities.

The team consisted of DCOF Manager Lloyd Feinberg of USAID's Environmental Health Division, Office of Health and Nutrition, Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support and Research, and consultants, John Williamson and Dr. Namposya Serpell. Mr. Williamson is DCOF's senior technical advisor on orphans and unaccompanied children and is co-author of *Children on the Brink*. This report, issued on World AIDS Day in 1997, provides the most widely accepted statistics and projections for the numbers of AIDS orphans in 23 AIDS-affected, developing countries, and outlines best practices for community-based approaches for the care and protection of orphans. Dr. Serpell is an economist who has undertaken research on the economic, social, and psychological impact of the AIDS epidemic on children. She also played a major role in the conceptual design and program development of USAID/Zambia's Orphans and Vulnerable Children project.

Objectives

The team divided its time into five, complementary segments:

- C Review of district- and community-level programs in Kitwe District in Zambia's Copperbelt Province under the PCI/OVC program;
- C Review of various non-USAID-supported, community-based orphans care and protection initiatives;
- C Participation in a USAID Regional Workshop on HIV/AIDS in Pretoria, South Africa (Feinberg and Williamson);
- C Participation in USAID/Zambia's Integrated Health Program (ZIHP) kick-off planning workshop; and

C Review of the Malawi Save the Children Federation (SC/US) COPE programs in Dedza District, Malawi.

At the end of the evaluation, John Williamson joined the White House HIV/AIDS and Children Advance Team for their South Africa and Zambia country visits.

During the field visits, the team had substantive discussions at the community and district levels with six community-based OVC committees and two district-level OVC committees in Zambia, and another four Community AIDS Committees (CAC) in Malawi.

PROGRAMMATIC ISSUES

Long-term Sustainability

Phasing-Out/Down Strategy and Community Ownership

Community ownership was difficult to assess in Dedza because the two CACs that the team visited had just recently been formed and were in the process of getting set up. Thus, these communities were more inclined to emphasize problems and expectations of assistance from official visitors from Lilongwe than their own activities with their own local resources (both human and material). In addition, the two communities were apparently receiving their first official delegation from Lilongwe, which might have further raised their expectations.

In light of this situation, withdrawal from the Dedza District seems premature. The approach of mobilizing the District AIDS Coordinating Committee (DACC) to be the driving force behind mobilizing Community and Village AIDS Committees does not appear to have taken root yet. Given the extreme importance of long-term sustainability of community initiatives for the care and protection of orphaned and other vulnerable children in these communities, a phasing-out strategy needs to be established before COPE pulls out of another district. This strategy might have to be applied on a district-by-district basis, depending on the progress achieved in terms of community cohesiveness and the extent of community activities initiated by the time COPE is phased out.

COPE is still at a stage of developing and refining a process that can produce sustainable community efforts to mitigate the impacts of HIV/AIDS on children and families. Some conscious experimentation is justified. In consultation with AIDS committee members as well as relevant ministries and nongovernmental organizations (NGO), COPE should try, monitor, and evaluate different approaches to increase the scale and sustainability of community efforts.

Community Ownership of the COPE Project in Namwera

The experience in Namwera was more encouraging apropos of community ownership of the project according to SC/US (COPE) staff members. Initially, as long as COPE was present in Namwera, the general impression was that it was SC's business. Thus, the process of the community taking ownership of the project was slow. However, according to SC/US, one of the indicators that this process had taken place in Namwera was that by June 1998, one year after COPE pulled out (leaving 16 Village AIDS Committees (VAC) mobilized) the CACs had mobilized another 10 VACs without much external assistance.

Recommended Follow-up on Phasing Down/Out

- C Consider the most effective way to phase down/out ongoing activities in the districts. The strategy could be gradual, i.e., instead of having two community mobilizers at the DACC level, engage a third who will remain to oversee community activities while the others move to work in new COPE districts.
- C Instead of pulling out of Dedza in April 1999, plan a more gradual (a minimum of one year) phasing down strategy to allow community ownership of the project to take root. The visiting team's assessment is that the CACs and the VACs in Dedza will not be adequately prepared for a COPE pull-out in two months.
- C Assist communities in identifying alternative internal and external resources to help sustain their efforts over the long term.
- C Build the communities' confidence in themselves to initiate activities using their own local resources and help them showcase what they have done without much external assistance.
- C Because some elements of the program work faster than others, use lessons learned from Namwera when phasing out of a district, e.g., phase out of those activities that are working and continue strengthening those that take more time to take root.
- C Use the results of the HORIZONS evaluation report in Namwera (when it is finalized) to inform future community mobilization/sustainability strategies to improve COPE's capacity building of the DACCs.
- C COPE could consider the time of the year at which to pull out, e.g., pulling out during the rainy season when the communities are most vulnerable due to poverty might not be ideal. Harvesting season might be a better time to pull out because the communities are able to feed themselves, and contributing to an orphans' initiative might not be such a burden on the households.
- C Overall, COPE's absence should not be sudden because this will disillusion the communities. Some communities might lose confidence in SC/US's ability to deliver sustainable services to communities that have been devastated by the AIDS epidemic.

Structural Soundness of the DACCS, CACS, AND VACS

Long-Term Sustainability of the DACCs and CACs

The DACCs and CACs are government-mandated structures created to deal with the AIDS epidemic in the country at national, district, and community levels. As such, these operational entities are likely to be needed for a long time. However, by being government structures, these organizations are likely to be lacking in operational resources. Additional resources may be required to increase the mobility of the DACC, CAC, and VAC subcommittees, for example.

The Government Structure's Lack of VACs

The other major problem in this structural set-up is that the government-mandated National AIDS Committee (NAC) structure does not include VACs, while COPE has VACs in its set-up. Thus, the government is not fully aware of COPE's activities and/or achievements at the village/community level.

Difficulty of Reaching Remote Villages to Establish VACs

Some of the villages/communities in Dedza are too remote to be reached by CACs in order to form VACs, and the Dedza DACC is unable to effectively coordinate CAC and VAC activities because of the distances involved. Because the plans are to strengthen the DACCs to play a more active role throughout the district, the transportation needs of the DACCs should be considered in the long term. For instance, at the time the team visited, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had donated fertilizer to be distributed to some of the VACs that had planted maize. However, the DACC in Dedza was having transportation problems. By the time the fertilizer is delivered, it might be too late to be of much use. Such occurrences might discourage future community initiatives and undermine the people's confidence in COPE's capacity to deliver services to the communities/VACs.

Recommended Follow-up on DACCS/CACS/VACS Structures

COPE needs to embark on serious promotional work in this current phase in the following ways:

- C Encourage Members of Parliament (MP) to become members of CACs.
- C Raise the COPE communities' skills in accessing their MPs, business communities, and religious organizations to ask for support and assistance in mobilizing both internal and external resources.
- C Advocate the benefits of the COPE program to the government so that the government can contribute to the program and/or ask the donor community to get involved in COPE programs around the country.
- C Expand COPE's advocacy role at the national level to include liaising with the National Orphans Task Force to reach an understanding on placing AIDS in a wider socioeconomic context, rather than treating it as solely a health issue, as is currently the case.
- C At the district level, create a stronger linkage between the DACCs, CACs, and VACs. Communication between DACCs and VACs could be enhanced by buying a vehicle and engaging a driver specifically for COPE activities in the district. COPE shares a vehicle and 12 percent of the time of each of two SC/US drivers. This arrangement is not adequate to deal with COPE's transportation needs.

Resource Mapping And Problem Definition

Problem Definition

Systematic resource mapping and problem definition is not transparent in the CACs and VACs that the team visited. The team was informed, however, that the DACCs hold discussions with the district health officers on HIV prevalence rates and available resources to identify which districts to target first. Such an approach confines the definition of HIV/AIDS to the health sector. Yet, the very essence of COPE is the recognition that AIDS is an economic, psychosocial, and health issue that requires multifaceted and multisectoral strategies.

Resource mapping and problem definition includes the following:

- C Problem identification and prevalence rating
- C Resource availability including transportation channels
- C Location of the largest number of orphans
- C Identification of all the orphans and other vulnerable children in the community
- C Needs assessment of the orphans and other vulnerable children in the communities (schooling, health, age-related needs, etc.)

C Needs assessment of HIV/AIDS-affected families/households

Recommended Follow-up on Resource Mapping And Problem Definition

- C Make arrangements for COPE program officer(s) to visit Zambia's PCI-implemented OVC program to observe how the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodology of community mobilization is carried out. The PLA methodology starts with resource mapping and problem definition, before strategies are adopted by the community itself on how they will solve those problems using their local human and material resources.
- C Arrange for the OVC program officer(s) from Zambia to visit COPE to share their PLA experiences early in the process of introducing the COPE program in new districts.
- C Ensure that the Training for Transformation syllabus includes resource mapping exercises for the DACC members. These members will then include that component in their training of the CAC members, so that by the time one gets to the VAC level, resource mapping skills are completely integrated in the whole community mobilization process.

Economic and Fundraising Issues in COPE

Income-Generating Activities in Participating COPE Communities

The participating communities in the districts where COPE has been introduced are basically poor with very weak economic and financial infrastructures. As such, any programs that require these communities to engage in income-generating activities to raise the community's resource base need to invest additional time and technical assistance to streamlining those economic activities at the community/VAC level. The issue is not only increased economic or agricultural productivity, but also imparting marketing, pricing, and accounting skills to these communities where the level of education might also limit the speed with which such messages can be absorbed. Although COPE should not engage in economic development issues directly (because it does not have a comparative advantage in that area), it could look for ways to establish linkages between participating VAC communities and other existing economic development programs in the area, especially where the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) is operating.

Availability of Credit at the Community/VAC Level

Assisting these communities to access agricultural credit and/or separate from microcredit of the type offered by FINCA is very critical. Few financial institutions operate at the village level and as such, participants in the COPE project have no means of gaining access to institutional loans. Because most of these communities are small-scale subsistence farmers, it is unrealistic to ask them to produce surplus for sale without extra credit and/or a viable transportation system. Thus, the introduction of the Local Income and Food Enhancement (LIFE) project in the COPE areas of Dedza, Nkhota Kota, and Mangochi is both appropriate and timely.

The Dedza DACC was already experiencing difficulties transporting the UNICEF-donated fertilizer to the CACs and VACs that had started community gardens. Thus, before communities are encouraged to start IGAs, careful planning is necessary, taking into account the availability of inputs, markets, and transportation channels. Improving interministerial/organizational coordination might be a potentially sustainable way to help AIDS committees cope with transportation problems.

Fundraising Activities

Although, as mentioned, the communities are poor, members of the CACs and VACs should be highly commended for contributing a little of the money that they have to the technical subcommittees, which include an orphans technical subcommittee. However, fundraising should not rely solely on members' contributions. The committees could benefit from a fundraising skills training program.

Recommended Follow-up on Economic Development Activities and Fundraising

- C Liaise with FINCA to ensure geographical overlap between COPE-participating communities and those where FINCA is planning to introduce their group loans. This will create real economic growth at the community/VAC level.
- C Assist communities to link with financial/credit institutions to access outside resources.
- C Monitor and evaluate the potential contribution of the LIFE project to food security and agricultural skills for VAC communities, and/or the potential for replication in all the VACs.
- C Enhance the skills of economic promoters to conduct training programs on small-scale business activities; loans; simple accounting skills, including banking and accounting; and general fundraising at the CAC and VAC levels.
- C Before COPE is introduced into a new district, conduct a baseline survey of the numbers and needs of orphaned and other vulnerable children in that district. This baseline information could then be used to assess quality-of-life improvements to affected families and children brought about as a result of the COPE project.
- C Enhance the fundraising skills of the CACs and VACs, especially at the community level. One strategy would be to engage a consultant to specifically assist communities in their fundraising endeavours.
- C Non-monetary activities: Encourage communities to use their own initiatives to help vulnerable children in kind rather than always in cash. For instance, the community can collect food to distribute to caregiving families/children who are unable to feed themselves adequately, collect firewood for elderly caregivers, or arrange transportation for sick children to go to the clinic/hospital. They could also solicit help from NGOs/churches.

Community Gardens Established by the Orphans Technical Subcommittee

The orphans technical subcommittee appears to be one of the most active of the subcommittees. Some VACs have established community gardens where they are growing maize and groundnuts. The expected yields are small because they used high-breed maize seeds, that require fertilizer to grow well. The maize and the fertilizer were donated by UNICEF. The distribution of fertilizer has also been delayed due to transportation difficulties at the DACC level. Furthermore, it is not known what will happen during the next planting season if the VACs do not get high-breed maize seeds and fertilizer from UNICEF.

Recommended Follow-up on Community Gardens

- C COPE should liaise with UNICEF on the length of its contribution and the amount of seed and fertilizer contribution that the VACs could expect from UNICEF if the VACs plant their community gardens next year.
- C Because the timing of input provision is critical, planning for the next season should start as soon as possible to avoid the delays in distribution that occurred this year.
- C COPE could liaise with the Ministry of Agriculture to assign extension workers to each VAC interested in agricultural production ventures to assist the communities especially in the use of alternative maize seeds and forms of manure instead of commercially produced fertilizers.
- C COPE could assist by hiring a technical advisor to assist VACs on the marketing, transportation, and pricing of their agricultural produce.

Developing Quality-of-life Indicators For Orphans And Other Vulnerable Children

Indicators to establish changes in the quality of life for the COPE-target population in participating communities had not yet been fully developed by COPE in Dedza when the team visited. HORIZONS had carried out an evaluation of the Namwera District COPE program focusing on long-term sustainability of the program when COPE pulled out. However, the report is not finalized.

To scale up activities at the district level, documenting the potential contribution of the COPE program to the improvement of quality of life of the participating communities, especially children, is critical. Demonstrating the long-term benefits of the COPE program also justifies continued funding of such a program.

Recommended Follow-up on Indicators of Success

- C Before COPE is introduced in a new district, conduct a baseline survey of the numbers and needs of orphaned and other vulnerable children in that district. Baseline information could be used to assess the improvements in the quality of life of affected families and children as a result of the introduction of the COPE project.
- C Engage an evaluator who could carry out an impact assessment survey of some of the participating families in Namwera on the changes in their quality of life brought about by the COPE project.
- C Use the Namwera evaluation report from HORIZONS to develop measurable indicators and inform future COPE programming in other districts.

FIELD TRIPS TO DEDZA DISTRICT

Mayani CAC

The Mayani CAC was formed in 1994. However, an evaluation of the CAC activities in February 1998 showed that not much was happening. Thus, COPE organized a multisectoral awareness training for workers from different government ministries, NGOs, and religious organizations. New elections were held and a new CAC was formed in March 1998. By the time the team visited, the Mayani CAC had formed 25 VACs.

Problems Experienced in the Mayani VACs are as follows:

- C Chiefs are not conversant with the COPE program
- C VACs have high expectations of external assistance
- C Most of the villages are too far to be reached by CAC members, especially women

Recommended Follow-up

- C Establish sub-CACs in different zones of the district closer to the communities, i.e., divide the district into geographical zones that can be reached by members of the CACs.
- C COPE could assist the CACs by buying bicycles to be used by CAC members when they need to visit VACs.

Mayani CAC Orphans Technical Subcommittee

Ten CAC subcommittee members were trained for two days. The subcommittee meets once a month and has been registering 1- to 18-year-old orphans in the 25 VACs. The subcommittee had registered 1,469 orphans and vulnerable children in the 25 VACs. A businessman had donated clothes for distribution.

Problems being experienced by the orphans subcommittee are as follows:

- C Lack of transportation to VACs
- C Food shortages during the rain season
- C Orphans stop coming to the children's centres when there is no food
- C Volunteer teachers have to make sacrifices to continue going to the children's centres
- C The communities' food contribution to the children's centres stops when families can not make ends meet.

Recommended Follow-up for the Orphans Activities

- C To ease the transportation difficulties, a few bicycles could be provided for use by members of the subcommittee.
- C It might be necessary for the committee to create a food reserve bank during the harvest season to use in the rain season when there is a shortage of food.
- C The committee could also assist volunteer teachers in kind, e.g., by ploughing their fields for them while they are attending to the children.
- C The orphans subcommittee needs help with their fundraising and income- generating activities. It might be necessary to engage a consultant specifically to assist CACs and VACs in a more systematic manner than has been the case so far, i.e., to focus on the committee members' skills at their own level instead of holding training workshops only at the district level.

Mayani CAC Home-based Care Technical Subcommittee

The Dedza DACC trained the CAC home-based care (HBC) subcommittee in the care and monitoring of the sick. The subcommittee then trained VAC HBC teams to help families with food, firewood, and transportation to the clinic and/or hospital. Each HBC subcommittee contributes K10 for the HBC fund. No medicines are given to the families; however, the Catholic church does provide some medicines directly to needy families. The subcommittee members are not trained in psychosocial counseling of HIV/AIDS-affected families. Psychosocial counseling, especially of elderly caregivers and orphans, is an essential service that needs to be integrated into the HBC frame of reference.

Recommended Follow-up on HBC

- C SC/US/COPE could introduce psychosocial counselling in the training syllabus for the HBC technical subcommittee members at both the CAC and VAC levels.
- C SC/US/COPE could also make arrangements to send DACC members to attend the OVC psychosocial counselling Training of the Trainers workshops organized by Children In Need (CHIN) in Zambia.
- C SC/US/COPE could also arrange to have the trainers for the psychosocial counseling component of the OVC in Zambia come to Malawi and assist in this effort.

Mayani CAC Youth Technical Subcommittee

The youth technical subcommittee is fairly active in forming youth clubs. The youth clubs use song and dance to disseminate messages about orphans and HIV/AIDS and to educate youth about good health and self-preservation. However, like other subcommittees previously discussed, these clubs lack resources, especially transportation, to enable them to form and supervise youth clubs at the VAC level. The youth subcommittee has a critical role to play in these communities. One of the most urgent goals in the battle against HIV/AIDS is to prevent the children who are the future leaders of these countries from contracting the disease. As such, youth clubs should be supported as much as possible. In this respect, COPE could try to assist communities in streamlining the activities of the youth clubs at the district level. They could also liaise with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on the skills training program that UNDP provided for the youth in the past, but which they no longer provide.

Recommended Follow-up on the Youth Clubs

The energetic and enthusiastic contribution of the youth to the general welfare of the communities, especially orphans, needs to be harnessed by streamlining some of their activities in the following ways:

- C Introduce small-scale skills training centres at the CAC and VAC levels that are accessible to all members of the youth clubs (some of whom are not in schools).
- C Assist the youth in fundraising, e.g., by encouraging them or arranging for them to perform at various functions, especially forums where HIV/AIDS issues are the major focus.
- C Assist the youth clubs in exchanging visits and/or meeting in workshops that are targeted at their level and interest.

COLLABORATION WITH UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

UNICEF

The UNICEF program in Malawi includes an orphan care and early childhood development and nutrition program that has been introduced in all 26 districts through the DACCs. UNICEF is also responsible for the establishment of the National Orphans Care Task Force. In addition, UNICEF is assisting families in income-generating activities at the individual household level using NGOs like Action Aid. UNICEF is also collaborating with COPE by providing seeds and fertilizers for use in community gardens that have been established by some of the CACs and VACs in Dedza District. UNICEF is thus, a natural partner for COPE to liaise with in program development, management, and implementation. UNICEF takes advantage of the DACCs ° CACs ° VACs structure to channel their assistance to the targeted communities. COPE could also facilitate links between AIDS committees and UNICEF. However, this liaison should be continuous. For instance, in the case of the distribution of UNICEF-donated fertilizer to the CACs and VACs, COPE was unable to transport the commodity to the beneficiaries in time because of transportation difficulties. This is a case in which COPE could have gone back to UNICEF and made alternative arrangements for transporting the fertilizer to the communities.

Recommended Follow-up on Collaboration with UNICEF

- C Improving food security in the communities and especially the nutritional status of orphans is critical. As such, this in an area where COPE and UNICEF could work together to streamline productive activities at the CAC and VAC level.
- C Since UNICEF uses DACCs, CACs, and VACs as programming channels, it might be useful for UNICEF and SC/US to take joint supervisory and programmatic roles, and/or conduct field visits to the communities once or twice per year.
- C Support to the youth clubs is another area of interest to both SC/US and UNICEF, and an area in which intensified collaboration could benefit those communities that are participating in both programs.

UNDP

In the past, UNDP supported a youth skills training program in collaboration with COPE. This program has been discontinued. In view of the need to train youth to become more economically productive members of their communities, it would appear to be an area where negotiations with UNDP and SC/US could be initiated as soon as possible. Although the youth clubs are very active on the communication and advocacy side, these youths need the means to earn a living as they grow into adulthood and have families of their own.

MAJOR PROGRAMMING ISSUES FOR CHILDREN ORPHANED OR AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS

Setting

Although Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, and other countries in the region are experiencing some of the highest HIV seroprevalence and AIDS-related mortality rates in the world, a 1996 UNICEF study conducted in four heavily affected communities in Kitwe and Choma Districts in the Southern Province, Zambia, determined that HIV/AIDS was not counted by communities as a significant problem. Orphans, on the other hand, were considered to be a major concern, along with poverty and the lack of education for children in general. The results of this survey are considered to be representative of other communities throughout the country.

At the time of the study, over 50 percent of all children in the survey areas had lost one or both parents, and 71.5 percent of all households were caring for at least one orphan. (This latter statistic should be compared with traditional extended family support practices.) This study further found that 98 percent of all orphans were being cared for by a surviving parent, the extended family, or particularly, grandparents. The problem of orphans in these countries has reached a level where virtually everyone, at all levels of society, is directly or indirectly affected by increased strains on the traditional, social, and economic family safety nets.

In countries such as Zambia, Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania where orphaned children have reached a critical mass, it is postulated that orphaned and vulnerable children are becoming acutely recognized points of focus within heavily HIV/AIDS-affected communities. Therefore, programs such as the Zambia OVC Program and the Malawi COPE program are increasingly perceived as important, if not inherently critical elements to be incorporated into national HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention strategies. Moreover, effective AIDS orphans-focused activities are considered to be important in at least three other respects:

The problem is of major humanitarian concern.

- C The special attributes of the problem in communities where a critical mass has been reached actually enhances traditional community efforts to improve health, educational, and related social and economic services and opportunities for children and the community.
- C Because the problem directly affects people at all levels and from all sectors of the political, social, and economic spectrum, the social and economic implications are evident and felt by political, business, and religious leaders in ways that can be used to mobilize policy changes and financial resources on the HIV/AIDS issue that might not otherwise be possible.

Crosscutting Issues

In reviewing DCOF's overall Strategic Framework, and as a result of the team's trip to COPE II in Malawi and the OVC project in Zambia, a number of crosscutting issues and concerns emerged. These included the following:

Strategic Planning

At the beginning of any initiative, a number of basic strategic questions need to be considered:

- C How can issues of national planning and policy be addressed and connected with provincial-, district-, and community-level activities to ensure appropriate communication?
- C In each country situation, what criteria should be used and at what structural level should new programs/activities be introduced (e.g., provincial, district, or community)?
- C Most effective community-based programs contain some form of participatory appraisal and planning to ensure community ownership and maximum participation. From experiences and lessons learned to date from AIDS orphans initiatives, what constitutes a minimal package of components (e.g., needs and resource mapping, criteria setting, organizational development, and community capacity building.)?
- C At the national and sub-regional levels, any new design should include an assessment of other, ongoing and planned activities, especially economic development programs.

Important Differences Among Communities

Although some planners may look for areas that are not receiving other, external assistance, serious consideration should be paid to the benefits and time savings to be achieved if OVC and COPE programs can build on existing structures and initiatives, especially with respect to income-generation activities such as those that promote increased accessibility to credit.