



## Joint Press Release

International AIDS Conference 2008  
For Immediate Release  
6 August 2008

### Zimbabwe Caregivers : On the Front line of HIV Care

**Mexico City, Mexico** – In Zimbabwe, volunteer caregivers represent the front line of HBC efforts and services yet they have access to very limited resources. To support these unsung heroes of the HIV epidemic, there is a need for more international donor support to reach grassroots and community level care work. This is according to a publication launched today by Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS), Health and Development Networks and Irish Aid.

“HBC activities need to be adequately resourced so that timely and high quality care is delivered to those in need. That is why it is vitally important for the government, the private sector and funding agencies to partner with civil society and to provide significantly more funding to these projects,” says Dr David Parirenyatwa, Zimbabwe’s Minister of Health and Child Welfare in the foreword of the publication.

Since 2005, Irish Aid has supported 15 Home-Based Care (HBC) initiatives in Zimbabwe. To learn more about the evolution and effectiveness of HBC in Zimbabwe, Irish Aid engaged Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS) and Health Development Network (HDN) to assess and document best practices in HBC programmes in Zimbabwe.

From the documentation process, several key policy recommendations have emerged and are presented in the publication, entitled, **“Caring From Within: Key findings and policy recommendations on home-based care in Zimbabwe”**.

The publication contain results collected through in-depth interviews with key players, a comprehensive literature review, first hand accounts of of local and personal realities surrounding HBC and an on-line discussion forum, the key role played by caregivers.

Funding agencies must begin to undergo a paradigm shift in their understanding of the key role played by caregivers. In short, caregivers need to be supported so that they can sustain their own livelihoods while still undertaking care work. Programme implementers and donors need to recognizethis in order to enhance the quality of responses at the community level.

The documentation process revealed that home based care has played a vital role in the Zimbabwean response to HIV as overwhelmed public health and welfare systems have failed to cope with the demands of the epidemic. Caregivers have to shoulder the burden of care with very little medical supplies, a scenario that puts them at risk of HIV and TB infection.

“Despite the burdens being faced by faced by caregivers in Zimbabwe, HBC is still one of the most cost-effective ways to deal with illness in the context of a crumbling health system,” states the report.

Volunteer caregivers display high levels of enthusiasm and dedication to their work, however, much of their work remains unpaid, unaccounted for and undervalued in economic terms despite its critical contribution to the overall economy and society in general.

Yet too often, HBC programmes fail to supply caregivers with basic tools such as medication, soap or gloves. Consequently, the role of caregivers is now largely limited to providing psychological support. In some instances caregivers are improvising – for example by using plastic bags as gloves – so that they can carry on with care work.

In communities where medication is not available, caregivers also often encourage clients to use herbal therapies and other nutritional supplements, says the publication.

A key challenge is that there is no common standard that HBC interventions adhere to, despite the existence of relevant national policies. The diversity of providers, services and delivery models makes it impossible to propose a single approach for scaling up HBC services to reach more people. The publication recommends that enhancing the coordination of HBC services requires a national audit of HBC programmes to ascertain the current scope of activities and assess where gaps exist.

International donors need to recognise the success that has been registered by HBC projects in Zimbabwe under very difficult conditions and be prepared to channel much needed funds into the country purely on humanitarian grounds divorced from political considerations to help communities cope with the epidemic.

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#### **About Health & Development Networks**

**Website:** [www.hdnet.org](http://www.hdnet.org)

Health & Development Networks (HDN) is a leading facilitator of information, dialogue and advocacy approaches on HIV and TB. Underpinning all of HDN’s work is the mantra ‘Speak Your World’, which focuses on increasing the voices of those least able to to speak out, including those of marginalized/isolated groups, communities and individuals affected by HIV and TB. Headquartered in Chiang Mai, Thailand, HDN works with and supports broader civil society to effectively respond to the epidemic.

#### **About Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service**

**Website:** [www.saf aids.org.zw](http://www.saf aids.org.zw)

Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Services (SAfAIDS) is the leading southern Africa regional HIV/AIDS centre of excellence, organizing, analyzing, repackaging and disseminating HIV and AIDS in response to the information needs of communities. Based in Harare, Zimbabwe, SAfAIDS’ core activities include providing accurate and cutting edge HIV and AIDS information through a variety of innovative channels to reduce people’s vulnerability and risk to HIV and TB.

#### **About Irish Aid**

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

Irish Aid is the Government of Ireland's programme of assistance to developing countries. Ireland has had an official development assistance programme since 1974.

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