

PART 1

The Process

Background to

1.1 Why have a National Children's Forum on HIV/AIDS?

South Africa has a population of over 43 000 000 people, of which approximately 17 000 000 are children.¹ Many of these children are at the coalface of the HIV/AIDS pandemic yet very few have been consulted regarding the programmes and policies that are developed to address their needs.

South Africa has a wealth of policies designed to "put children first" but the reality is that most children in South Africa still live in unacceptable conditions in which their rights to housing, food, education, health care, family care and protection are violated. In order for decision makers to respond appropriately to the needs of affected children and their families and in accordance with their best interests, it is essential that children are provided with the opportunity to engage with decision makers.

We have a moral and a legal obligation to allow children to participate in decisions which impact on them. The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (which South Africa has ratified) states:

"Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. For this purpose, the child shall be provided the opportunity to be heard ..."
(Article 12)

“ What made me happy is that what I came for was achieved, which is to talk about things I've kept inside me. ”

The National Children's Forum was borne out of the recognition of this commitment and the realisation that unless children are consulted, we will continue to fail in our attempts to design and implement policies to benefit children.

1.2 What was the National Children's Forum all about?

The forum brought together 90 HIV-affected children (7 to 18 years of age) from all 9 provinces in South Africa. The aim of the forum was to provide these children with the opportunity to have their voices heard and for their views to be considered in the drafting, implementation and monitoring of relevant policy and programmes.

Over the course of the 3-day event, the children shared their experiences and ideas through child participatory research activities with skilled facilitators. They spoke about the challenges they face on a daily basis, the way HIV/AIDS has affected their lives and about their support systems.

On the last day of the forum, the children met with representatives from national government and parliament. Together they discussed the roles of civil society and government in addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on children.

The objectives of the forum and subsequent activities are:

1. To address the issues raised by the children as a matter of urgency

“ I learnt to be open like others, and not shy. ”

the Forum

2. To increase awareness of the impact of HIV/AIDS on children in South Africa
3. To ensure that the views, experiences and recommendations of the children who participated in the forum are considered in the design, implementation and monitoring of relevant policy, programmes and legislation.
4. To encourage child participation in other decision making processes

This report is one of many documents and activities designed to assist us in realising these objectives.

1.3 Who participated in the forum?

In identifying the 90 children who would participate in the event, the decision was taken to work with organisations rendering services to children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. The reason for this decision was that the organisers wanted to ensure that the children who participated would have the necessary support available to them

The age and gender breakdown of child participants who attended the forum:

Age	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Boys	3	1	3	3	1	4	4	1	6	2	2	0	30
Girls	5	2	7	6	5	4	9	8	2	4	2	6	60

before, during and after the event. The organisers also wanted to be able to maintain contact with the children after the event and to involve them, wherever possible, in follow up activities.

Over 500 organisations were notified of the event and invited to apply to participate. Almost 100 applications were received from organisations around the country. The following issues were taken into consideration when deciding on the final participants:

- Provincial representivity
- Rural and urban locality
- Age of the children
- Gender
- Ensuring that a range of affected children were able to participate
- The capacity of the organisation to prepare and support the children prior to, during and after the 3 day event in Cape Town

18 organisations were finally selected (*see Appendix 2 for a list of organisations*) and each of these organisations was asked to select 5 children and 1 caregiver to attend the forum.

The 90 children who were selected were between the ages of 7 and 18 years, spoke 13 different languages and included:

- Children infected with HIV through mother to child transmission
- Children infected with HIV through sexual abuse

“ I felt hurt due to stories I heard which were very sad. ”

“ Before I felt it was only me that didn't have parents. Now I know that I am not the only orphan. ”



- Children caring for sick and dying parents and siblings
- Children heading households
- Children living on the streets as a result of the impact of HIV on their household
- Children living in children's homes and hospices
- Children orphaned by AIDS

Prior to confirming their participation, the organisations were asked to obtain the consent of the children and their caregivers and to arrange with the children's schools for the children to be excused from 3 days of classes. The organisations were also provided with some ideas on how to prepare the children for the forum.

“ We played around and ate nice food. ”

1.4 Design of an NCF logo and slogan

Two months before the National Children's Forum, a 1-day workshop was held with 50 children from 4 different schools in the Western Cape. The workshop was facilitated by youth involved in the Children's Resource Centre programmes. The aim of the workshop was to design a logo and a slogan for the National Children's Forum. The slogan and logo were used on the letterhead and printed on the bags and t-shirts that were given to the children and caregivers who attended the forum (*see acknowledgements page*).

2 What Happened at the forum?

2.1 How were the children's experiences discussed and recorded?

The children were divided into small groups, according to age and language. They worked in these small groups with a facilitator, a scribe and, if necessary, a translator for the entire 3 day period. There were 9 groups of between 7 and 14 children each. The table below shows a breakdown of the groups.

A range of structured child participatory activities were used at the forum. The activities were designed to be non-threatening and fun and to facilitate discussion around particular themes (*see Appendix 3 for a description of the activities*). All facilitators, scribes and interpreters were invited to a 1-day preparatory meeting before the children arrived. The meeting was used as an opportunity to get to know one another and to practice the activities that had been designed for use with the children.

Over the course of the 3 days, the activities were interspersed with ice breakers, games, musical activities, lunches, tea breaks and outings.

The children's participation during the forum was recorded using tape recorders and scribes. Approximately 30 hours of audiotape were transcribed and translated into English. During this process, every effort was made to capture the children's words as authentically as possible.

AGE RANGE	LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF CHILDREN
7 to 12 years	Afrikaans & Tsonga	8 children
13 to 18 years	Afrikaans	7 children
8 to 11 years	Sotho, Tswana, Sepedi	13 children
12 to 14 years	Sotho, Tswana, Sepedi	10 children
13 to 18 years	Sotho, Tswana, Sepedi	10 children
7 to 12 years	Xhosa	7 children
13 to 18 years	Xhosa	10 children
7 to 12 years	Zulu	14 children (<i>divided into 2 smaller groups</i>)
13 to 18 years	Zulu	11 children

2.2 How was this information processed?

The workshops with the children were not designed in such a way as to allow for thorough qualitative analysis of the data. Instead, the information was arranged thematically. Clustering the children's quotes under the various themes allowed us to determine the extent to which certain issues were common among the child participants. The issues that have been selected for the report are those that emerged strongly as common themes.

3 How will we ensure that the children's voices are heard by decision makers?

3.1 The children met with key stakeholders

On the last day of the forum, the children met with representatives from relevant national government departments, national parliamentary committees, media and other agencies who had been invited to participate.

The meeting with these key stakeholders involved the following:

- 1. Presentations by the children:** Each group of children was asked to select a spokesperson and an issue that they wanted that person to talk about. The elected "presenter" worked with the group's facilitator to prepare a short input. The 9 children who were selected from the 9 groups made presentations to decision makers on behalf of their groups.
- 2. Press conference:** A small group of selected children were invited to participate in a press conference. A strict code of conduct was developed for the media and acceptance of the code was a prerequisite for attendance at the event.
- 3. Small group discussions:** The children were divided into their groups and each group of children was joined by a group of decision makers. The children discussed with the adults the issues that had been raised over the course of the 3 days as well as their recommendations for how these issues could be addressed.



- 4. Drama:** Children who were not involved in the presentations were invited to be part of a drama. The drama was developed and facilitated by David Dennis (Soul City) and Shaughne Reynecke (Soul Buddyz) with input from the children. The children presented the drama to the decision makers as part of the programme on the final day (See Appendix 4 for copy of the song that was sung by the children)

3.2 The Children's Institute has an ongoing advocacy campaign

The children's experiences have been shared through South African and international media, submissions, presentations, displays and other activities, initiated not only by the Children's Institute, but also by children and

**“ We were not sent around
[to do chores]
- it was lovely. ”**



“ I feel good because I have someone to talk to about my personal problems and I want to thank this group for listening. ”

adult participants of the forum and other concerned individuals and organisations (*see Appendix 5 for the list of follow up activities completed at the time of going to print*). These activities are ongoing and snowballing as more and more people are exposed, through the words of the child participants, to the devastating impact that HIV/AIDS is having on children in South Africa.

Through the Institute's policy research and advocacy, the children's shared experiences have been used to motivate for the needs of HIV affected children to be addressed in the drafting of a new Children's Statute and the draft National Health Bill. The information collected at the forum is also being incorporated into a larger research process to develop guidelines for improved service delivery to children who have been orphaned or who are at risk of being orphaned.

4 What can I expect to find in this workshop report?

For the purposes of this report, we have elected to present the themes that emerged most strongly during the activities with the children. Each theme is presented as a chapter in the report.

The report is made up mostly of children's experiences as expressed by children during the 3 days of the forum. The report presents the children's experiences through their own words and through the artwork they produced at the forum.

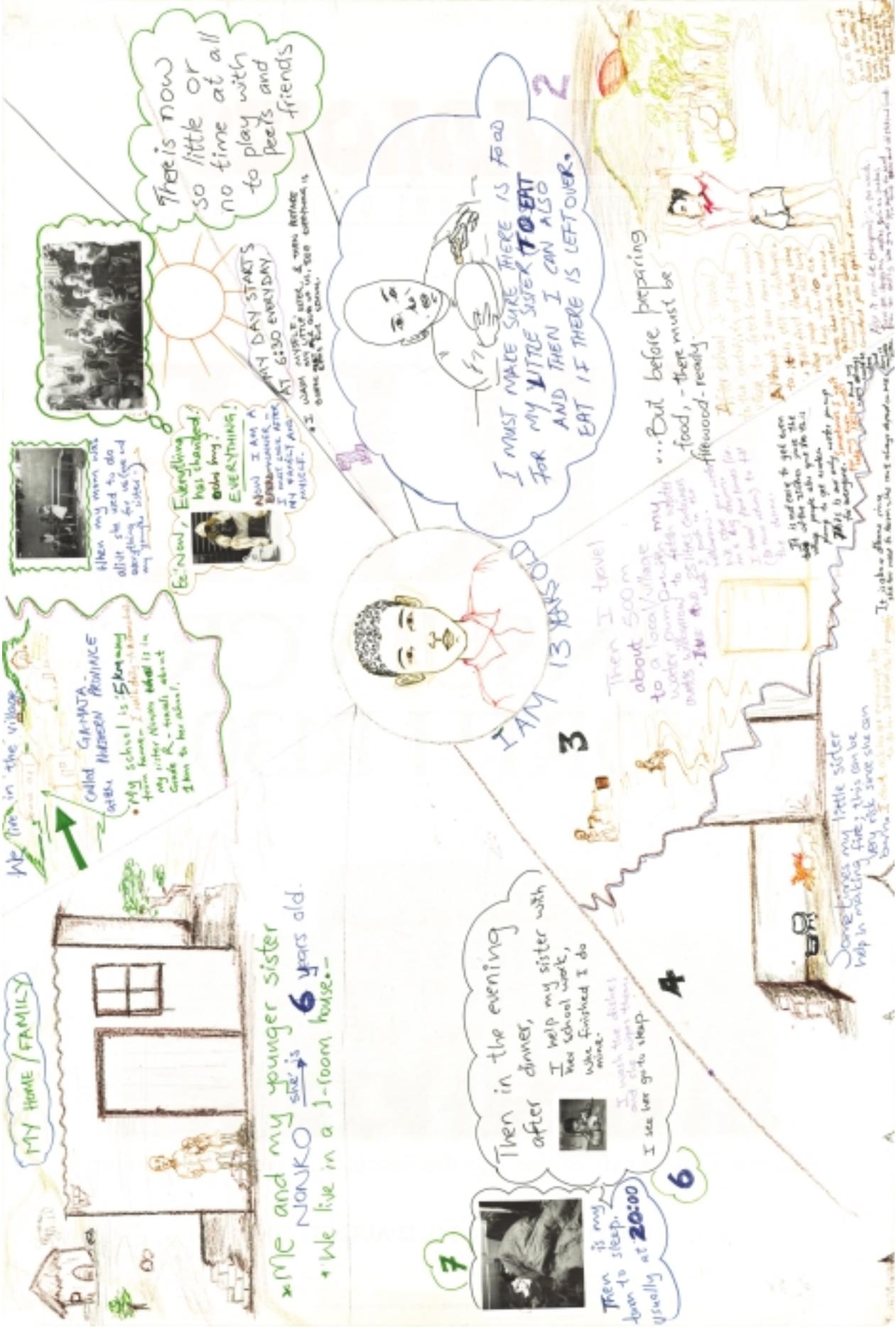
All names have been changed to protect the child participants.

As you go through the document, you may notice children's quotes in the 3rd person. The initial activities were designed to allow children to talk about the experiences of children generally, without asking them direct questions about themselves. In many instances, the children began speaking in the 3rd person but as they became more comfortable with their group, it became clear that the experiences they were referring to were their own.

At the end of each chapter there is a summary of the key issues raised by the children and, in some instances, recommendations on how to address these issues. The recommendations made in this report are limited to the ideas that were generated and discussed at the forum.

The chapters in this report each relate to a specific theme and the children's quotes have been arranged accordingly. However, when reading the document it is important to bear in mind that the problems faced by any particular child could span any or all of the chapters. Each issue should therefore be viewed in the context of the other issues eg. A child who is unable to attend school because she cannot pay her school fees is also the same child who has recently lost a mother and who is caring for a sick sibling. One of the shortcomings of adopting a theme-specific approach in the report is the fact that the report may not adequately portray the full impact of HIV on any one child.

Finally, while this report focuses on children who are directly affected by HIV/AIDS, many of the issues raised are not unique to this group of children.



Aphiwe, 13 years old: My life.