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# The Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative



**Capitalisation Series: SDC Supported Projects and Activities in HIV/AIDS**

A fact sheet elaborated in the frame of the 2009 SDC Backstopping Mandate with support from the Swiss Centre for International Health of the Swiss Tropical Institute

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## Introduction

**The Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI)** is a regional non-profit organisation designed to mitigate the psychosocial impact of HIV and AIDS, poverty, and conflict among children and youth from 13 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

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## Objectives

REPSSI aims to ensure that all children affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty, and conflict have access to stable, affectionate care and support to foster their psychosocial wellbeing. They strive to provide leadership, quality technical assistance and knowledge in psychosocial care and support (PSS) for children and youth in the affected communities.

- Develop a knowledge base in the application of PSS
- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge, skills, and information on PSS
- Strengthen the capacity of governments, civil society and other institutions to respond to the psychosocial needs of children affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty, and conflict
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system of REPSSI and their partners

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## Project Description

The triple crisis of HIV and AIDS, poverty, and conflict is felt by millions of children and families in Eastern and Southern Africa, leading to unprecedented catastrophe in the region. The children endure the loss of caregivers, livelihoods, social networks, and health. Many suffer deprivation, abuse, premature dropout from school, forced early marriages, the burden of caring for sick parents and siblings, overwhelming loss and grief, upheaval, discrimination, and social exclusion. Such traumas often affect their intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal relationships with family, community, and friends. Limited availability of psychosocial support hinders their resilience, coping skills, and social connectedness.

The PSS needs of these children are often overlooked by caregivers from the, family, community, society, and government who come into regular contact with the children as they focus on addressing their material needs. Support for children's psychosocial wellbeing is a crucial investment in human capital. It forms the basis for the long-term development and stability of society.

The REPSSI secretariat in South Africa has three additional sub-regional offices in, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania. They provide technical support and work in partnership with local NGOs whose main focus is to offer care and support to children affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty, and conflict. Processes include PSS knowledge development, research and shared learning, as well as organizational capacity strengthening for advocacy, policy, training, mentoring and coaching. REPSSI currently works with numerous governments and over 300 community based partner organisations in Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi,

Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. Furthermore, REPSSI works closely with UNAIDS, UNICEF, and SADC.

REPSSI has become a leading source of knowledge for PSS tools, manuals and guidelines. The current PSS Wellbeing Series contains over 25 publications. Some of the key publications include:

- *Mobilizing Children into Their Own Child and Youth Led Organisations*
- *Journey of Life: a community mobilization tool*
- *Memory Work Manual: life review and succession planning for individuals affected by HIV and AIDS*
- *Body Map, Tracing Book and Treatment Information Series: antiretroviral treatment (ART) adherence and treatment literacy for people living with HIV and AIDS*
- *Hero Book Manual: children and youth are invited to be the authors, illustrators and main characters of a self made book which explores psychosocial obstacles and solutions in their lives*
- *Tree of Life: invites conversation about loss and support*
- *Mainstreaming PSS Series: including Education, Nutrition, Paediatric HIV Treatment, Economic Strengthening, Early Childhood Development, Home Based Care, Child Participation, and Conflict*
- *Are We Making a Difference: a child centred participatory monitoring and evaluation approach*

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## Results and Achievements

The technical support and capacity building that REPSSI has provided to the region has enabled at least 1 million children to access some form of quality psychosocial care and support. REPSSI has brought the issue of psychosocial needs to the forefront of the agenda for children affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty, and conflict at international, regional, and national levels. Simultaneously, their efforts have significantly influenced regional and national responses to PSS as an important aspect in planning national actions for children and strategies for reduction of the impact HIV and AIDS. Most regional governmental entities, e.g., the Department of Social Development, Ministry of Education, as well as international NGOs, FBOs and CBOs are demonstrating a mind shift and now include psychosocial support in their budgets and strategies. REPSSI's technical support to the SADC Secretariat has resulted in the development of the first SADC Orphaned and Vulnerable Children and Youth Framework which will seek to mobilise regional actors and resources to influence programmes and initiatives aimed at vulnerable children and youth.

In a partnership with UNICEF and the University of Natal, REPSSI launched the African Centre for Childhood in 2009 which offers the Children at Risk Certificate Course piloted in eight African countries. Currently some 600 students are registered.

The PSS tools developed by REPSSI are widely used and appreciated both within the region and beyond Africa, such as in Nepal or Haiti.

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## **SDC Partnership**

SDC has been an instrumental partner and donor since the creation of the regional initiative. Apart from SDC, REPSSI receives funding and/or support from the following organisations: The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, New Zealand Agency of International Development, Symphasis Charitable Foundation, Department for International Development, and Intersim.

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## **More about this Project**

[www.repsai.org](http://www.repsai.org)