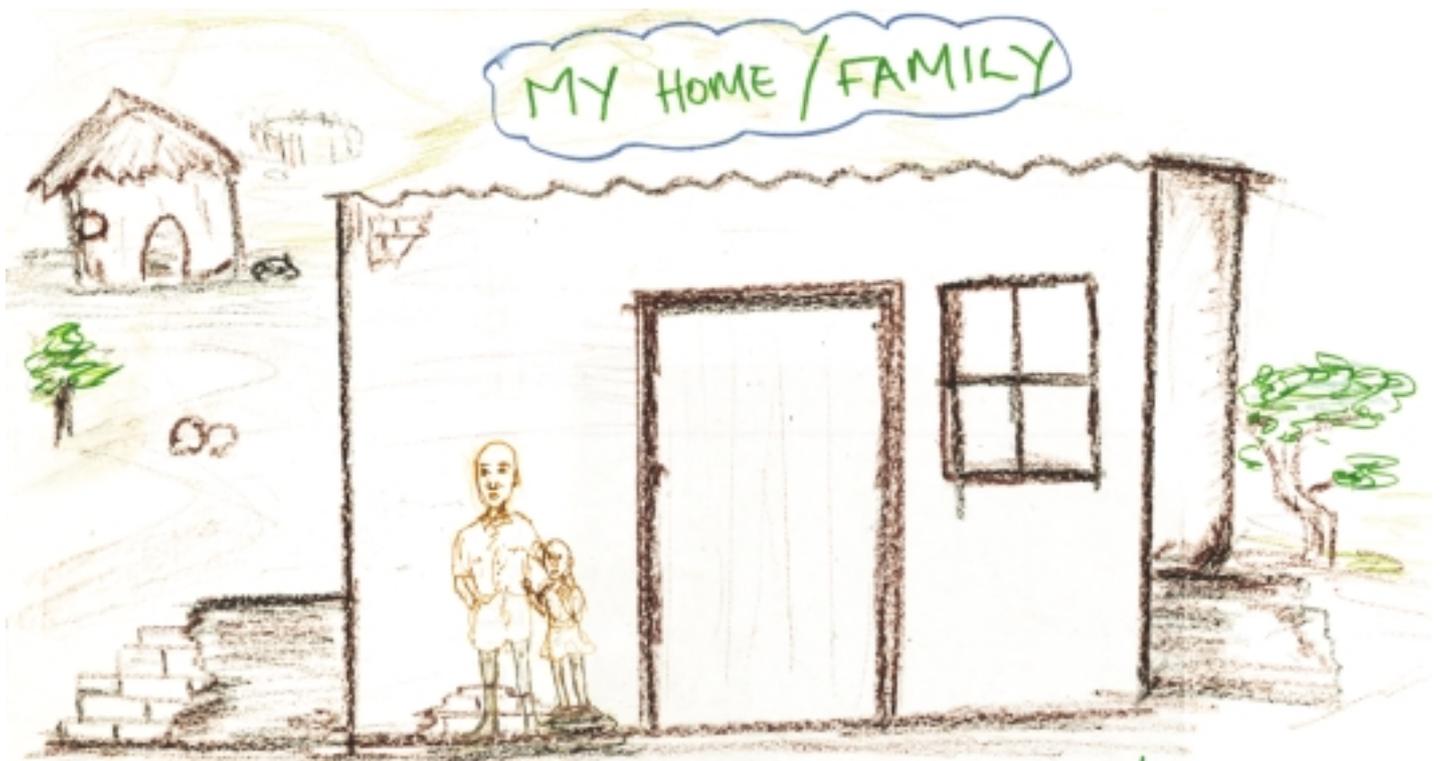


CHILDREN AS Caregivers and Breadwinners

7



* Me and my younger sister
she is 6 years old.
* We live in a 1-room house. -

7.1 The right to rest and to play and to be protected from exploitative labour practices

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says:

- Every child has the right to rest and leisure, and to play.³²

The Constitution says:

- Every child has the right to be protected from exploitative labour practices.³³
- Every child has the right not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that -
 - are inappropriate for a person of that age;
 - or place at risk the child's well-being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development.³⁴

What do these rights mean for children?

- Children should not have to work in order to survive. Society must provide a nurturing and protective environment that allows children to be children; to go to school, to play, to feel safe and happy, to rest, and not to have to bear the stress of adult responsibilities.
- When society has failed to provide such an environment, or in times of social emergencies such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the government has a duty to:
 - ensure that the worst forms of child labour are eradicated,³⁵
 - urgently work towards creating a society in which children do not have to do any form of work in order to survive³⁶
 - ensure that children who are forced to work for survival, are provided with support in order to ensure their work does not harm their education and development.³⁷

“ My sister is 6 years old. I must look after her. ”

7.2 Children's experiences

7.2.1 "I don't have parents, it's just me and my sister"

As the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to grow, so do the number of children living without adult caregivers. Children as young as 9 or 10 years of age are taking responsibility for maintaining households and caring for younger siblings. One child's story (*and artwork, see page 13 & 34*) captures some of the physical and emotional difficulties faced by children who are heading households.

Aphiwe, 13 years old: "My sister is 6 years old. I must look after her. And after school, I must go to fetch firewood at the veld. It is not that far. My sister must come with me on my back because there is no one to watch her when I go. Sometimes my friend also comes with to get wood for his house. I look after the chickens, and this is where I cook food outside, and I must sweep the house. If I fetch water from the tap I have to pay but I do not have any money, and so I have to walk a long distance. On weekends I wash clothes. My sister and I cook and clean. I don't have parents, it's just me and my sister. There are no grownups living with us. My aunty comes over but she stays far by her work, I only see her sometimes. Just the neighbours live near. People [in the community] don't say anything, but just gossip behind your back. I need a television, and a bathroom tap and clothes and shoes. And water also, inside the house. But especially, someone to tuck me and my sister in at night-time."

Many of the children living in child headed households have no income and are unable to access social assistance grants. These children rely entirely on the generosity of neighbours, relatives and organisations.

Vuyisile, 14 years old: "Both my parents died, I live in their house by myself and other neighbours bring me food."

Nomvuyo, 11 years old: "There are 13 children in our home. A lady cooks for us. My mother died this year and my two small brothers also died."



Wendy, 13 years old:

“The picture is of my home. The ambulance is fetching my mother. The flower is me. I have to stand tall and protect my mother and my house... My mother had another baby, I looked after my mother till she died, then I looked after the baby. He died of hunger.”

7.2.2 “You have to go to school, but also to look after the baby”

Children who attended the forum spoke about how they are responsible for caring for their sick parents while at the same time, ensuring that the needs of their younger siblings are being met. Some of the children asked for help with their caregiving ‘duties’ so that they could attend school knowing that their parents were being cared for.

Sefale, 8 years old: “I do not have a mother anymore. My mother died of AIDS. I stay with my grandmother, and my father and my sister. At home there is no food most of the time. My grandmother and father do not have money. They are not working. My father is sick. I clean

the stoep first thing in the morning. Then I go and cook pap for my father and grandmother. I look after my father and grandmother. I then go to school. After school I pick my sister from the crèche. I play with her after school. I am helped by social workers. When I grow up I want to be a doctor.”

Karabo, 9 years old: “My father is sick. I stay with him and my grandfather and my little sister. I wash my younger sister Seipathi in the morning. After washing I take her to the crèche before I go to school. After school I wash dishes, go to buy bread and fetch my little sister. I make tea for him [father] and I cook for them. I sometimes go and buy live chickens that I prepare.”



Nthabiseng, 16 years old: "They should build hospices for these people who are suffering or have AIDS. Where you can get people to look after you so that you can die peacefully. Children don't know how to treat their parents because they are still young. I think a hospice is the right place for people who are close to death."

Thembisa, 13 years old: "It is hard to look after a sick parent and younger siblings and try to be at school."

Lumka, 13 years old: "When your mother has HIV but she's got a small baby and she dies and leaves that small baby also with HIV, then you have to go to school, but also to look after the baby."

Nthabiseng, 16 years old: 'Children stop going to school because they don't concentrate when they think that they left their parents in bed. They think that anytime they can 'clocksa' [die]"

Alicia, 15 years old: "I had to come home and look after the children, wash, clean and I could not do my homework. When I go to school I used to get beaten because my homework was not done."

Sindile, 14 years old: "I want someone who will look after my grandmother when I am at school. You find that you don't have money to help her when she is ill. We are far away from the hospitals. I wish we can get help from government. The government can help children who are affected by HIV/AIDS by giving them opportunities like other children."

“ Children don't know how to treat their parents because they are still young ”

7.2.3 "I herd cattle and goats"

Many children living in HIV-affected households are responsible for the household income. Children who attended the forum spoke about the work that they do in exchange for money, food and the payment of school fees.

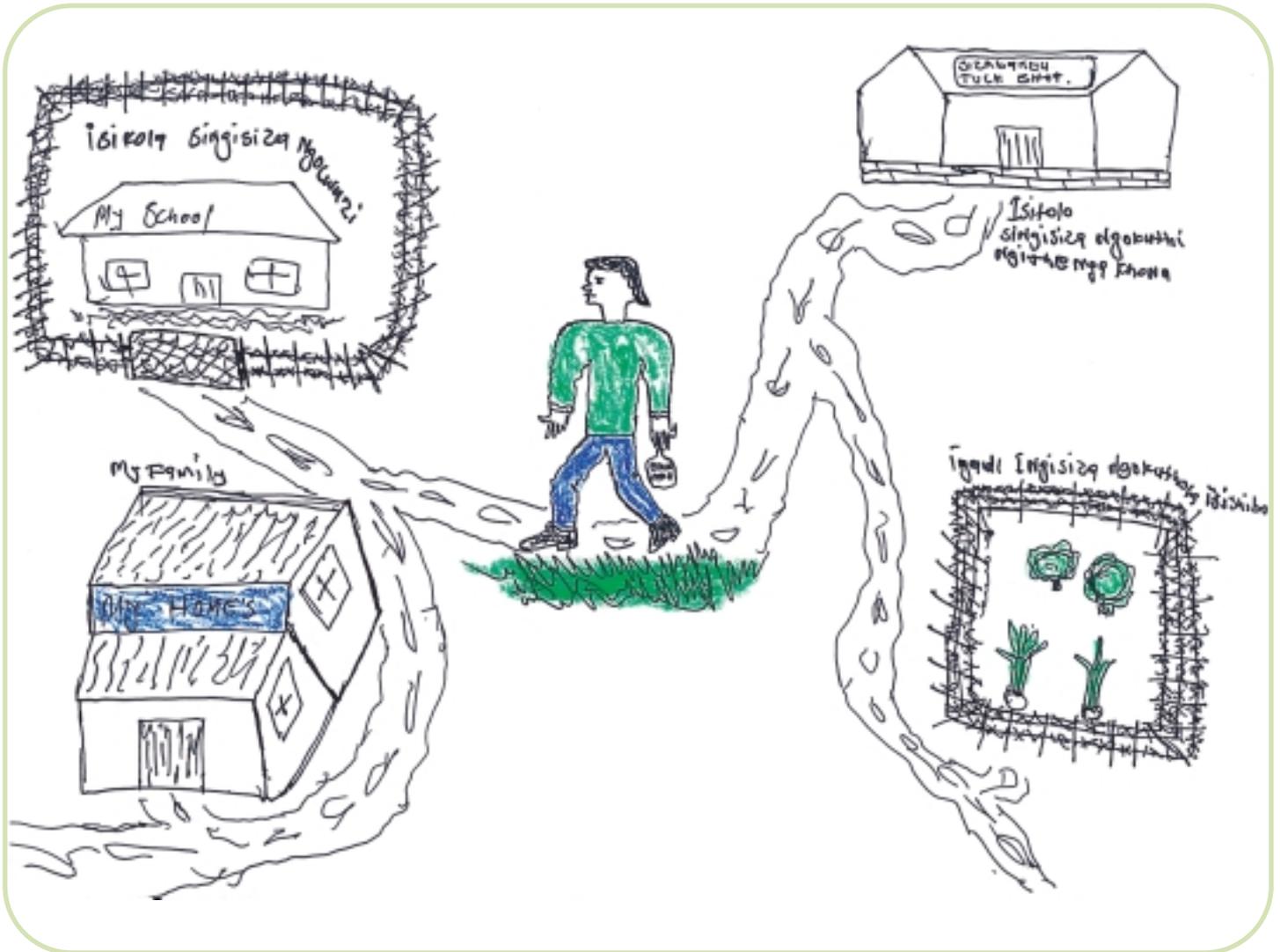
Joseph, 9 years old: "I don't have parents. I wake up, wash then take my books to school. During break I go home to eat. After school I go and herd cattle and goats"



for my uncle. The money they pay goes towards my school fees and food in the house. Sometimes I do not go to school. Then I come back late with them and drive them into the kraal. I work for my uncle and people in the village”.

Bongi, 10 years old: “I used to work and get late for school and then get hit, 4 or 5 strokes.”

“ I used to work and get late for school and then get hit, 4 or 5 strokes. ”



Bheki, 17 years old:

“ This is my school. This is my neighbour, my neighbour’s garden. Everyday when I come back from school I go to work in my neighbour’s garden. At home we are 5 children. My father and mother died. The food that we eat comes from my neighbour’s garden. And they pay my school fees. The neighbour is the most important person in my life because he helps us. ”



7.3 Conclusion

Many children are assuming the roles of breadwinners and caregivers in HIV-affected households. As a result, they are unable to fully realise their rights as children and they commonly report being unable to attend school regularly. The children's experiences point to their need for support, including the provision of day care for younger siblings and for sick parents to enable children to attend school, changes in policy to provide all needy children with income support, the extension of organisations providing home based care services, and the development of job creation and skills development programmes.