

Who Takes Care?

Children of Crisis



Essays by Namibian Learners

Edited by Michaela Fink and Reimer Gronemeyer

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NAMIBIA PUBLISHING HOUSE

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Edited by Michaela Fink and Reimer Gronemeyer

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Michaela Fink and Reimer Gronemeyer

Giessen, October 2013

List of Abbreviations

AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ARVs	antiretroviral drugs
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NSFP	Namibia School Feeding Programme
OVC	orphans and vulnerable children
SDF	school development fund
WFP	World Food Programme

About the Editors

The editors, Prof. Reimer Gronemeyer and Dr Michaela Fink, are sociologists based at Giessen University in Germany. Since 2012, they have been conducting a research project on how Namibia is dealing with the orphan crisis. The project has been generously funded by the German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG).

Introduction

In the year 2012, we asked learners in Epinga (North Namibia) and in Havana (Katutura, Windhoek) to write short essays dealing with the following questions:

- Who takes care of you?
- Growing up in times of AIDS: What is your experience?

We picked one rural and one urban setting and are very grateful for the support provided by the principals and teachers.

From the very start, it must be mentioned that the learners' essays form an impressive collection that proves how alert, lively and clever these children are. The stories show the wisdom and maturity of young people whose everyday lives are mostly made of crises and catastrophes, with HIV and AIDS, as well as food security, playing a major role in this regard.

We could not publish all of the 120 essays we received from Grade 6 and 7 learners of Havana Primary School in this book. Merely a collection of 50 stories was selected for publication. The selection was based on two criteria: diversity and readability. Essays that were difficult to understand due to poor English skills (English is only the second language of the children and not their mother tongue) were not included. However, the 48 essays we received from Shimbode Combined School in Epinga, from Grade 9 and 10 learners, have all been published.



All school essays are published anonymously. Names within the essays have been changed and private information removed to further preserve anonymity and prevent identification of third parties.

We polished the essays linguistically, without modifying the statements or diction. Explanations are provided in brackets, and quotation marks have been added for direct speech to improve readability.

It must be noted that, when the learners write about their experiences, they describe their subjective perceptions, which are not necessarily based on facts in all details. At the same time, the opinions that the children express in their stories do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

Besides the school essays (Chapter 1 and 2), the book includes an essay (Chapter 3) written by a young girl from Swakopmund, Justina Vatilange Matatias, who is the winner of an essay competition we announced in *The Namibian* in 2012. The last chapter of the book (Chapter 4) contains excerpts of the interviews with Ms Elma Mazeingo and Ms Bertha Amushila, who are teachers at Havana Primary School, and with the Principal of Shimbode Combined School in Epinga, Mr Toivo Shilumbu.

The essays and interviews were generated for a research project at the University of Giessen, Germany, entitled “AIDS-orphans in Southern Africa (Namibia): Social crises and social powers”, run by Reimer Gronemeyer, Michaela Fink and Julia Erb and funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2012-2015.

This book is a first publication in the context of the mentioned research. It is mainly addressed to schools and to organisations that are dealing with orphans and vulnerable children. It is meant as a contribution of the affected children to the discourse on their wellbeing. Furthermore, the book is addressed to anyone who is interested in a deeper understanding of childhood in an African country like Namibia that has to deal with the challenge of a high number of orphans and vulnerable children on a daily basis.

School Profiles

Shimbode Combined School, Epinga

This school is located in the bush in the northern Namibia, near the Angolan border. The road leads through deep sand and an idyllic landscape. From time to time, one will pass an egumbo, an ensemble of huts, enclosed by a palisade that is surrounded by mahangu (pearl millet) fields and fruit trees. Cattle, goats, donkeys and chickens belong to that landscape, in which people would normally have their subsistence, producing enough food and living together with their extended family.

Neighbours are mostly remote. The social context of children is, therefore, primarily the egumbo and its residents. Sometimes there are herders with their animals around and a few Cuca shops, where people sell home brew called oshikundu. The shops are popular meeting points for men and women. Most people have to walk long distances to get to a small informal market. In the rainy season, large areas are flooded; in the dry season, one will find blazing heat.

In contrast, the bush school is a symbol of the state and modernity. It consists of low-rise buildings with many classrooms and a big water tank at the edge of the schoolyard for the dry season. There is no water pipeline but electricity is available. The whole environment – the classrooms and the accommodation for the teachers – is very simple.

Local women voluntarily cook oshifima, the daily pap for the learners. The maize meal is sponsored by the Namibia School Feeding Programme (NSFP), a nationally-run and funded Government programme controlled by the Ministry of Education (MOE).

The World Food Programme (WFP) initiated school feeding in Namibia in 1991. Since 1997, the school feeding has been completely taken over by the Government. The programme reaches approximately 270 000 beneficiaries at primary level in more than 1 200 state and private schools.¹

For many learners in Epinga, this meal is the only secure meal they have each day. The pap is cooked over an open fire, which has always been problematic during the rainy season. In April 2013, a group of volunteers from Germany built a small outdoor kitchen for the school so that now pap can be cooked also on rainy days. However, sometimes the volunteers do not come to prepare the meal. According to the principal, since the women do not get paid for their work, they often prefer to go to any event that is taking place in the village. Those days the plates will be empty.

Many learners have to walk long distances every day to reach the school – one hour in the morning to get to school and one hour in the afternoon to get back home is common.

In the middle of the schoolyard, there is an old wall riddled with bullets – a memory of the times of apartheid and liberation struggle. The bullet holes came from the South African militia, who burned down churches and schools in the Ohangwena region. A significant amount of fighting occurred there.

In 2012, 365 learners were registered at the school – about 120 of them were half-orphans or complete orphans.² Many learners come from very poor households, but, up to the beginning of 2013, it was only the orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) who did not have to pay their school fees. Since then, all Government Primary Schools in the country are free for Namibian children. But the learners still have to buy stationery, school uniforms and other things they need, which can be difficult for them.

Despite the fact that the Government offers a child welfare grant to the amount of N\$200 per orphan/vulnerable child per month for food and shelter, not all affected children receive the money. There are various reasons for this.

For example, many children do not have the necessary documents to register for the grant (i.e. birth certificate or death certificate of the parent/s who passed away); there is still lack of information about the grant; the process of registration takes a long time; and people cannot manage the long and costly distances to reach the relevant ministries in order to register.

¹ *The Namibian School Feeding Programme: Cost Analysis*. Ed. by Republic of Namibia and World Food Programme, September 2012, p. 6.

² Statistics obtained from an interview with Mr Toivo Shilumbu, Principal of Shimbode Combined School in Epinga, Ondangwa October 2012

There are also barriers in terms of language, as some people only speak their local language and no English; and some guardians are misusing the money, as in many cases a legal guardian and a child live far away from each other and so it can be a difficult to transfer the money to the child.

Although the situation is complicated, the Government is working hard to solve these problems.

Havana Primary School, Katutura, Windhoek

Havana Primary School, with its almost 1 500 learners, is located in Katutura, a part of town once segregated for black residents of Windhoek who were placed there divided along the ethnic groups under the apartheid legislation.

Katutura is growing rapidly, and Havana is its younger part. Mostly migrants from the rural areas live here under very difficult circumstances. Not many have regular jobs. Most inhabitants of Havana live in corrugated iron huts without water and electricity. The families are big and there are many children.

Havana Primary School is a new big complex of buildings established by the Government. The school juts out of the ocean of shacks. In Oshiwambo language, these poor homes are called *kambashus*.

The people of Havana are facing a daily struggle for shelter, food, water and clothes. For us – the visitors from Europe, the competencies of the people who manage to live here under such extremely hard conditions are very impressive.

Compared with Epinga, in Havana there is something fundamentally different. Several ethnic groups and languages are represented in this school, and this showed in the learners' performances for our welcome. Their singing and dancing reflected their different traditions, such as Damara, Ovambo, Nama, Herero and others. Although they all speak English, they are fluent in many local languages.

In 2012, there were 1 435 learners at HPS, of which 169 (11.8%) were half-orphans or complete orphans, and 210 were vulnerable children. Combined together, there were 379 orphans and vulnerable children in the school – that is 27.7% of the school's population³, compared with 32.9% of the OVC in the school in Epinga.

The Essays

The schools are located in extremely different areas, but the experiences of the learners do not seem to differ too much from each other. The young people from Epinga and Havana, in Windhoek, just as their essays, show a stunning vitality and life force and the ability to master the difficulty of their everyday life. This is all the more astonishing as many learners wrote upsetting stories.

³ Statistics obtained from an interview with Ms Elma Mazeingo and Ms Bertha Amushila, teachers at Havana Primary School in Katutura, Windhoek, September 2012

What is Conspicuous?

1. The learners report numerous relocations. First of all, there is a continuous movement between Windhoek and the rural parts of northern Namibia. Reasons for the high mobility are for example:
 - a) migration of parents who are looking for jobs and therefore leaving the child in the care of an uncle, aunt, grandmother or one of their elder children
 - b) changing from primary to secondary school
 - c) sickness or death of parent/s or other caretakers
 - d) separation of parents
 - e) lack of food in the household which prompts the parent/s to send the child to the relatives
 - f) grandparents who need help around the house, therefore children are sent to provide support.
2. Children living with both of their biological parents are rather an exception in Namibia⁴ (many parents are separated or have never been married, a lot of children lost one or both parents).
3. In most cases, children who live with their mother have a stepfather.
4. Most of the essays report the death of a parent, close relative or friend. AIDS is playing a big role in those examples.
5. The question “Who takes care of you?” was primarily interpreted not as a question about the emotional bond between children and adults, but rather as a question about the material support and responsibility for the basic needs of the children, such as shelter, food, clothes, school fees, uniforms and stationery.
6. Most of the learners have responsibilities at home (cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes, selling products, looking after siblings, pounding mahangu, fetching water and fire wood, looking after cattle).
7. Food security is of great importance in the essays. Very often there are too many people in the households and not enough food available. Adopted children, in particular, feel neglected in terms of food and other material support. Many children point out when they have lunch boxes prepared for them to take to school.
8. As important values, learners state “manners” and “respect for elders”.
9. Corporal punishment is prevalent. Children accept punishment, even corporal punishment, as long as it is justified in their perception as a consequence of their disobedience.
10. Besides “manners”, “respect”, “food”, “school fees” or “beating”, other frequently used topoi in the essays are, for example, “jealousy” (regarding other children in the house) or “discrimination” (because of HIV and AIDS). The essays report how affected children or adults experience gossiping, neglect or abuse.

⁴ According to the Namibia Demographic Health Survey 2006-2007, only 26% of the Namibian children under the age of 18, who were interviewed for the census, were living with both of their biological parents, whilst 34% of the children lived without both biological parents, 33% of the children that were interviewed were living at that time with their mother and only 5% with their father. It is common in Namibia for many children to live with relatives or other caretakers and not with their biological parents. It can be assumed that the orphan crisis is intensifying that practice.

11. When the learners write about HIV and AIDS, they often criticise the promiscuous behaviour of their relatives. They tend to use the same phrases, such as “AIDS is a killer disease”, “people who have HIV must take their pills”, etc.
12. Most of the children notice the government’s support (especially the child welfare grant), but ask for further assistance. In this regard, they do not focus only on the government but also on their own communities.

From our personal point of view, the essays allow an insight into a society that seems to be closer to life in many respects. Even though many of Namibian children struggle and suffer a lot daily, to the point that one may wonder how they can still go on and stand up straight, they apparently have a clear understanding of what is important in life, compared to children in Europe who are more and more buried under plastic toys, fast food and too many possessions, and who are excluded from social responsibilities and regarded rather as future investments and projects by their parents.

Cooking at home, washing clothes, cleaning the house or looking after siblings – these responsibilities are not part of life for the majority of children in rich European countries. The modern world of consumption does not really exist in the essays of the children from the Shimbone Combined School and Havana Primary School in Namibia. What these children would like to have and what they expect to get from their parents or caretakers are small and basic things of everyday life, such as shoes, clothes and school stationery and of course sometimes sweets and toys.

Havana Primary School and Shimbone Combined School are not elite schools, but many of the learners consider themselves as the future leaders of their country. However, the image of the Namibian family and society created in the essays is generating contradictory impressions, with the daily struggle for survival, food, clothes and social cohesion.

Children experience many different caretakers due to numerous relocations. Many of the learners have to accept the absence of their biological parents or suffer their sickness, death or separation. Some children are themselves infected with HIV. Nevertheless, the majority of learners keep their will to live in spite of their difficult experiences, although some choose to commit suicide, as the essays report.

For many children, the will to live and lust for life are synonymous with oshifima, a cool drink and neat clothes – the important things in their everyday life. Although they dream of becoming doctors and pilots and have clear ideas and hopes, those are too often unrealistic.

The Italian poet Pier Paolo Pasolini once cited the phrase of “the era of the bread” (F. Chiantini) regarding the old countryside Italy, whose fall he was witnessing. Pasolini wrote about the beauty of a simple life in poverty that is not equal to a life in misery! “It is a fact”, Pasolini wrote, “that unnecessary goods will make life meaningless”.⁵

⁵ Own translation of this quote into English. Source: Pier Paolo Pasolini. *Freibeuterschriften. Die Zerstörung der Kultur des Einzelnen durch die Konsumgesellschaft*. Neu hrsg. v. Peter Kammerer. Berlin 1998, S. 55



Chapter 1

**"Who takes care of me?
Growing up in times of AIDS"**

*Essays from Learners of
Havana Primary School, Katutura, Windhoek*

“My mother tried hard to take care of us”

Victoria, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

In 2000, we went to Karas when my father was sick. My father died in 2002, when I was only two years old. I always used to ask my mother when dad is coming back, but she only told me that he went to the North.

In 2004, we went to the North. There my grandmother told me that my father was dead because I always used to ask my grandmother. I didn't know what death was. I would always ask my granny, “What is death?”, but my grandmother would get tired and tell me to stop asking her questions.

In 2005, we went to Windhoek. My mother was struggling with work. She got work as a security guard. She called my aunt to take care of me. My aunt always used to tell me that she was sick and she was telling me about HIV. I started asking her questions while my mom was there, but my aunt didn't answer me. My mom heard that my aunt was always telling me about her illness, and my mother got angry. She warned my aunt to stop telling me about her illness.

In 2006, my aunt died of HIV, and there was no one to take care of me. My mother took me to Katima Mulilo to her cousin. I started Grade 1 there. My mother's cousin was treating me badly.

In 2007, I went back to Windhoek to continue with Grade 2. In February 2007, my mother lost her job and was again struggling with work. In April, she got work at Ramatex.

My mother got a baby boy in August. I was very angry because I was the last born and I was treated very good. But when my mother got a baby boy, I was not treated very good.

In 2008, my mother's cousins' firstborn died. When we went to the funeral, I saw people crying, and I was asking myself: why are they crying if she went to rest? I thought so because my aunt used to tell me that my father went to rest. So I thought the same about my cousin that she also went to rest. Then, my mother told me about death until I understood what death is. I realised my father also died.

I was sitting in my room, holding my father's photos, crying. My mother told me to stop crying for my father because he would never come back again. But I didn't want to understand because I missed him so much.

In 2009, my friend's mother also died. When I told my mother she told me again about death until I understood.

My mother and my stepfather are always arguing in the night. In March, my mother broke up with my stepfather. She lost her job in June.

In 2011, my mother got a job in a cash loan. She tried hard to take care of us. Until now my mother is the one who is taking care of me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was 11 years old, my friend died. My other friends used to tease me that my friend died of HIV. One day when our teacher was teaching us about HIV, the whole class started laughing. I was the only one who was not laughing. The whole class was looking at me and started laughing at me.

At break time, they started saying that I was also infected with the disease. I was telling them, but they didn't understand. After the break, our teacher taught us how to stay with friends who have HIV and how to support them. No one was laughing.

HIV is a killer disease. It kills only when you are not following the doctor's instruction. There are pills to prolong the life of persons who are HIV-positive. No one knows where HIV came from. Some people are saying it came from a monkey, but all they are saying is a myth.

“One of my friends was affected by HIV/AIDS”

Martha, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

I grew up with both parents in Angola – it's where they moved when there was a war in Namibia, so they moved there to stay. Mostly I want to thank my parents that they keep on treating me good, including my mom who was suffering because I was suffering of this disease that we call asthma.

I was coughing a lot of days because of this disease. My mother travelled with me to take me to the hospital and she was taking care of me. From then, my mother was tired of me, and she told my brother, who was staying in Windhoek, to come and take me.

My brother came to take me and I was still coughing. He brought me to Windhoek and he took me again to the hospital in Windhoek. My treating there was also good. He took care of me and I was so happy to stay with my brother.

I kept on going back to the hospital to get my answer on what was wrong with me and which disease or virus I was having, but the doctors didn't want to tell me. I did not go there anymore because they didn't want to tell me, so my brother decided not to go anymore.

The problem was that my brother wanted me to start the school in Windhoek, but I was not having the report of birth. He took me to the kinder garden and I was going there. I was there for almost two years. In 2006, I started Grade 1 in Rehoboth – it's where he took me. I was staying there one year. When I came back from there, I told my brother that I don't want to go there because there is hunger, so my brother agreed because I was thin.

In 2007, I started Grade 2 at Havana Primary School until now, 2012. I am now in Grade 7. My brother told me that I'm now grown up and I have to take care of myself so that I can be someone one day. I keep myself safely and concentrated on my school work.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I have been told by my brother how to keep my body safe when I was a girl and to stay away from boys. My brother has been keeping on telling me.

One day when I was coming from school, I met my friend. We greeted each other as usual. She told me that one of my friends was affected by HIV/AIDS, so I tried my best to listen to her.

When she was done, I told her to stop for a moment. I told her not to spread out those things, to talk those things to other people. I went home and went to my friend and found her crying.

So I asked her what was wrong and she told me to give her some advice. I told her I will try my best to be with her and to help her where I could now.

“Mommy, money”

Shipena, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

I am Shipena, I am 12 years old, and I am schooling at Havana Primary School. My mother is Ms Hilma, my father is Mr Hangula, and my sisters are Ndapandula and Helena. I am born on 13th of December 1999.

I love my mother and my father. One day, my mother came home, she bought me a cake. It was not my birthday, she just bought it for me because she loves me too. She told me that she loves me and said it again.

I must study very hard until upper grades like my big sister. My big sister is schooling at the North at UIM Secondary School, and the one that I follow is in Grade 11 at Secondary School.

Our house is in Havana. We live in it with my mother, my father and me. We don't have electricity, we only use candles and cooking gas. My mother is working at Katutura central hospital and my father is a policeman. My mommy told me everything about boys, that they can destroy your life. I must wait until I am grown up and finished school.

My mother is suffering so much about food. When she gets money at the end of the month, my sister is saying “mommy, money” for what and what, “mommy, money” for food and school fees and so on... adding a good buy.

My friend is Helvi in Grade 7 at Havana Primary School.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I feel so badly, people do not understand about the virus. It is not good to have a virus like HIV/AIDS. This disease can kill you once you get it. It can destroy you. If you do not go to the hospital, you can die that day.

There was a girl called Martha. This girl was 12 years old. She was coming from school, and one man told her, “Let's go and I will buy for you a sweet,” and the girl said, “Ok,” and they went to the man's house.

He opened the door and they went in. The man was having a sweet and he gave it to the girl and was taking the girl's clothes off. Then they did their work. When the girl felt that she has pain, she was running away, whispering “Help, help”. The people who found her helped her. They called the police and the police asked him, “Why did you rape the girl?”

But he did not answer.

“She always wants to kill herself”

Anna, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Anna and I'm in Grade 6. I stay with my sister, brother, mother and my father. My father has a job and my mother did not get a job. We are five.

I live in Havana. I am schooling at Havana Primary School with my sister. My brother does not go to school because he is small.

Who takes care of me are my mother and my father. My mother teaches me manners. Sometimes my sister doesn't want to go to school, then my mother will beat her.

I help my sister with her homework. Sometimes when my teacher gives me homework and I don't know what to do, I ask my mother or my father to help me. Sometimes my father says that if you are given homework, you must ask so that we can help you.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I feel about the virus unhappy because sometimes, when a person gets HIV/AIDS, she feels that she can kill herself. I have my mother and she has HIV/AIDS. She is always crying and she always wants to kill herself. I often tell her, “You are not the only one who has HIV/AIDS, many people have HIV, but they don't say that they will kill themselves.”

HIV can spread by touching another person's blood, if that person has HIV, or by using a tooth brush. HIV cannot spread by eating together and it cannot spread by washing together or sleeping together.

“He uses to eat up the money”

Thomas, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

I am Thomas, I school at Havana Primary School. I am 13 years old and I stay at Havana and I am a Wambo. I talk Oshiwambo and my family also talks Oshiwambo.

Havana is a nice place because we have electricity and clean water from the tap. We are lucky that we have all the things. My mother does not work and my father works at Walvis Bay.

We just stay with my mother. She takes care of us in our house. We are six children, except the big people, they are two, my mother and my uncle.

My father uses to come at the end of the month to visit us just for two days and goes back. He uses to leave some money at home so that my mother can buy food for us some time, when she goes to the North and visits her mother.

When my father gives my uncle money to buy food for us, he uses to eat up the money, buying his things. He uses to drink alcohol and when the money is finished, he will come back home because the money is finished.

My father does not know that my uncle uses to eat up the money he left for us. We used to tell my father, but my father does not believe us. But when we were telling my mother, she is the one who uses to believe us. Some time, my uncle just used to beat us, but we did not do anything.

One day my mother told my father that my uncle uses to eat up the money and my father believed her because she is a big person. He thought that we were making jokes.

My mother uses the money to buy food, enough food until the end of the month. My mother likes taking care of children.

In December, my father will come so that we can go to the North and take care of our cattle and our *omahangu* [pearl millet] and to go to my grandmother and grandfather. When the school starts in January, we will go back and start schooling.

“If you don’t respect your mom, you die”

Wilhelmina, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Wilhelmina. I am 12 years old. I am in Grade 6. I am schooling at Havana Primary School. I am a girl. Our class teacher, Mr Amutse, he learns us maths.

I live with my mother and my brother. My mother likes me. She works in Spar and brings for us food to eat.

When I go to school, I will have bread and something to drink. When my mother goes to work, we will have to cook. When she comes back, she cooks. I have to wash plates, pots, cups and clean the house. My brother washes the window.

I live in a building where there is electricity. Our house has three rooms, one is for my mother, one is for me and the last one is for my brother. My mother sometimes uses to wash our clothes in the holidays.

My mother teaches us how to respect people. She told us a story about a girl staying with her mother. One day, the mother died. The girl was not respecting people. She stayed alone in the house and also died that day. My mom said “respect each other”.

My mom also said that we are the leaders of tomorrow. I just want to tell you that if you don’t respect your mom, or whoever, or you swear, you will not live a long life. God will punish you and you die.

When I am grown up, I want to be a pilot. I am a clever girl.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When you are having HIV/AIDS, you need people who will take care of you. I will take care of people who have HIV. If you don’t take care of that person, you may also get HIV.

Trust the person as your mom, father or sister. I will help him/her to go and get the pills and to eat healthy food every day. She or he must drink the pills every day.

HIV/AIDS is a disease that can kill you. You can get HIV/AIDS when you have a car accident.

I must not hate a person who has HIV. If you hate a person, God will punish you or the person will feel bad. We need to help each other as one family.

“Sometimes we use to eat only bread because there is no money to buy paraffin”

Diana, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Diana. I live with my mother and father and my brother. We are four in the house. I live in Havana. Our house is built with bricks.

My mother and my father, they use to take care of me. My mother cooks for me, my brother and my father. My father uses to show me love and he does for me everything that I want.

I use to eat at home and I don't use to come to school with food, but my father uses to give me money sometime. He drives a taxi and he shows me love. My mother uses to make *tombo* [traditional beer].

In our house, we cook on a paraffin stove that we put paraffin in. Sometimes we use to eat only bread because there is no money to buy paraffin. Sometimes I go to school without eating, but when I go back home after school I will eat then.

My mother is a good woman. If you ask her for something that is important, she will give it to you. And my father uses to bring for us hot dogs when he has money.

Our house is a bit small, but not too small. I sleep with my brother down on the mattress on the floor, and my father and mother sleep on the bed at the back.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I am feeling bad for a person who is born with HIV. I am feeling bad because people are calling her names like *ombuto* [virus], and they are throwing stones, bottles and other things at her.

If you are HIV-positive, you must drink your medicine so that you can feel better. I am not going to stay away from you because you are HIV-positive, I will just be with you, playing with you and eating with you. If you have HIV, eat healthy food and vegetables so that you can have energy and you can do something.

“The people must make a plan to kill this disease”

Tuyeni, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Tuyeni. I live in Havana. I am 12 years old and in Grade 6. I am schooling at Havana Primary School. I live with my parents.

My parents take care of me every day. My mother prepares food for me when I come home from school. She tells me stories and teaches me how to respect adults. I love my mother.

I respect my father because he takes care of me. My father buys for me clothes, shoes and the school stationeries. He tells me how I must take care of my bag.

My sister helps me to do my homework and to study. She helps me to wash my mothers' and my fathers' clothes. Sometimes she cooks food for us to eat. She teaches me how to spell the word correctly.

I respect my parents because they do good things to me. They teach me many things that I don't know. I love my parents.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV is a killing disease and it is a dangerous disease. HIV is not good because you cannot get tablets that can kill the disease. HIV can damage your body, and it is not good for you to stay in a dirty place because you may get more diseases. The people must make a plan to kill this disease.

“When he comes home, he wants to beat me”

Mirijam, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

I am 12 years old and I live with my parents. I am schooling at Havana Primary School in Samora Machel Street. Our principal is Mr Andreas K. Katangolo. Our class teacher is Mr Amusto – he teaches us math. We have many classes.

I live with my mother and father. My mom does not have work. She only sells chips and other things. My father buys for me all the things I need for school.

My mother told me that I must take care of my sister. I have three sisters and one brother, my brother is in Grade 9. Two of my sisters are not going to school. My cousin does not come home early so I have to do all the work in the house.

My father takes care of me. He always does everything I need. He is always the one who will buy pens and books for me.

My uncle is working, but he just stays in the bar and drinks. When he comes home, he wants to beat me. I don't know why he is doing this. I told my mother, but she says that I must just let him and do what he wants.

When I am going to sleep, I can have a time to do some of my homework. Sometimes I forget that I have homework. Sometimes, if my mother is there, I can do my homework and she does the housework. Some of my friends throw me with stones.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I feel sad about the children that are raised by parents who have HIV/AIDS. They are also having HIV/AIDS. Nobody else can take care of them. The family does not care about them. The grandmother is very old. The family does not want to stay with people having HIV/AIDS. Now they are street kids. They eat from the bins the food which is rotten. They lose their school friends and people don't care about them.

Sometimes, the mother was born with a virus and her kids got a virus in a car accident. The father died in a car accident.

“Sometimes they only buy for their children”

Hileni, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Hileni and I am in Grade 6. I'm 12 years old and I'm schooling at Havana Primary School. I have one sister and two brothers from my father's side and I have two sisters and one brother from my mother's side.

My mother and my grandparents use to take care of me. They use to buy for me clothes, but sometimes they only buy for their own children and that makes me feel bad. And when my mother buys for me clothes, my other brothers and sisters use to be angry and they don't want to talk to me.

My grandmother, when she is buying things, she is buying for everyone, except for the ones who are not walking.

When my mother got paid, this whole year she didn't buy for me anything, she did just buy for my little brother. Me and my sister we did not get anything from her.

Sometimes when she is sending me to do something, I don't want to go because she is not buying for me clothes. I just want to say “Send my little brother” because he is the one who gets clothes from her – every single month new clothes and shoes. She just uses to go with him to town.

She did not even buy for me a single pen or my school property. She did just buy for me a school uniform, that is all. Sometimes I use to cry because of that.

When the mother of those other children is going with her children to town, I feel bad, thinking that I wish she could be my mother.

And when they are coming back from town, I use to be jealous of them because they have good clothes, nice shoes and their mother did not even bring for me something.

My mother takes care of me and sometimes she doesn't take care of me. She promised me that this month she will go with me to town, and if she keeps her promise, I will do for her everything she wants.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I feel bad because this disease is killing many people. This disease is not coming to play in your body, it will come straight to kill you. And if you know that you are infected with the virus, go to the hospital and tell the doctor to advise you what to do and what you must not do.

If you are infected, you must not drink alcohol, take drugs or do other bad things. Try to drink your pills each and every day and don't be afraid of anything. You must be strong like a person who does not have HIV or AIDS. You must go to the hospital the day you have been told to go there.

And you must pray to the Lord to bless you so that the disease can get out of your body and not be with you forever. If your friends are rough with you, don't worry because they think the virus will not affect them. But it will come by itself.

You must not play with HIV and AIDS.

“People like doing sex without a condom”

Gerhard, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Gerhard. I am schooling at Havana Primary School and I'm in Grade 6. We live in Havana. I was born in the North on 20th of November 1999 and I am 12 years old.

My mother and my father are the ones who take care of me. I live with my family: my two sisters and my mother and my father and uncle. My father works, my mother sells *okapana* [meat sold on the street] and my uncle works too.

My parents take care of me by paying my school fees and buying a uniform. They like me to go to school to have a good education, so I can take care of them when they are old. We live in a good iron house. There is electricity and we have an old TV. Sometimes the TV costs too much electricity and TV licence.

I like living in our house because there are friends always watching TV too, and I'm playing games with my friends and we also play volleyball and do drawings. These are my favorite things to do. My friends like to watch kids on NBC.

We eat my favorite *omahangu* meal [millet pap] with *omaere* [curdled milk]. In the holiday, we go to the North and go feeding pigs. At the North, there is my grandmother and my grandfather and my two cousins, a boy and a girl.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV is a virus that can come from sexual intercourse because people like doing sex without a condom and you can die because of HIV if you are abusing drugs, drinking alcohol and smoke. HIV stands for Humane Immune Virus.

HIV can kill you without taking drugs and smoking. If you are not drinking your pills and do not wash yourself or your clothes, you will be very sick and you will die.

The information that I have about people who have HIV/AIDS is that they must drink their pills and wash themselves and their clothes. And us, who do not have HIV, we must not run away from these people. We must help them as long as we do not touch their blood, or we will be infected.

“My caretaker is Rauna”

Shoombe, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Shoombe. I'm a student at Havana Primary School. Our class teacher's name is Mr B. Amutse. He teaches us mathematics. Our school principal is Mr A. Katangolo.

We are five in the house: my mother, my father, my uncle, my sister and myself. My caretaker is Rauna, she is a girl from Omusati region and she shows me love when she takes care of me.

Rauna's mother is alive, but her father died when she was 18 years old and now she is 25 years old. She does good things to me, because I also do good things for her, like washing for her dishes, washing her clothes, braiding her hair, etc. Some people in our location use to blame her, because she is being braided by a small kid.

Rauna cooks in the evening and I love her lifestyle because she is a hardworking girl and she does the jobs you gave her. She can do any job and anyone can trust her.

Her mother died this year. It was this month, and her mother was buried on Saturday because she died on Wednesday.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I'm going to describe how I should experience a person with HIV and AIDS. I have to go and encourage her to drink her/his ARVs and not to leave them because if she does, she will die and never come back again.

The person that is having HIV/AIDS will remind others to drink their ARVs, to go and exercise, not to drink alcohol or to abuse drugs and she/he must not smoke cigarettes or dagga because it will damage her lungs. They will get lung cancer and pneumonia and they will not breathe in a good condition, they will only be nearly to die and no one will be able to afford looking after them.

“My mother is not working, but she is the one who is feeding us”

Lucia, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

I'm Lucia. I'm a student at Havana Primary School. I have four brothers and two sisters. I'm a girl of 13 years. I live with my mother, my grandmother and my stepfather. My father did pass away while I was not even born. He passed away in 1998. My mother takes care of us. My hobbies are dancing, modeling and swimming.

I live in Katutura, Windhoek. In our environment there is many crime, but our environment is clean. I live in a *bashu* [*kambashu* – simple hut]. We don't have a TV or electricity.

The food is enough, but we are many, and every day we are going with food to school. My mother is not working, but she is the one who is feeding us. My sisters are not working – they are going to the upper school. No one is working in our house.

I don't have much else to say. Thank you very much.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I feel so bad because this disease is dangerous. I feel pity for people who have this virus. I know some people who have this virus. They are my neighbours.

HIV is a killer disease. People who have HIV, it is not like you may not eat with them, play, sit, share things or sleep with him or her in the same bed. This disease will just spread when you make sexual intercourse by not using a condom.

“I don't know how to stop her sleep around”

Elina, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Elina and I'm in Grade 6 at Havana Primary School. In the house where we live, we are 11. My father died long, long ago, maybe I was two or three years old. I was born in 2000.

I like our school because it's neatly, healthy and it's having lots of education.

My mother's name is Anna and I am having one sister and one brother. My sister's name is Selma and my brother's name is Malakia.

In the North, I stay at Oshikoto region. Our village is very beautiful.

I have lots of friends and they are: Johanna, Claudia, Diana, Shopala, Lydia, Helena, etc. And the friends of mine that are boys are: Pandu, Nestor, Charles, Eben, Samuel, Ndalonga, Taleni, etc.

My grandmother's name is Carane and my grandfather's name is Viliho. My cousins' names are Diana, Kapandu, Wimpie, Nangula, Tuna, Manga and Tiopolina. My cousins and friends are too many. I can't finish naming them all.

I love my cousins and friends, mother, father and my sister and brother. I love all of them too much, more than anything.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I was worried when my aunt got HIV because she sleeps with many men and some are single and some are married. I use to tell her that it is very dangerous to sleep around with many men, but my aunt, she never listens to me and she says that I don't know anything.

I used to ask my aunt, "Do you go to a clinic to get tested?" When I ask my aunt these questions, she is getting angry. And I don't know how to stop her sleep around with different men. I feel sorry for my aunt and I don't know why she is so rude, my sisters don't care. I am praying to God to help her please!

"My mom hates me and my dad loves me"

Victoria, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Victoria and I'm 12 years old. I am a student at Havana Primary School. We are six in our house. We are staying in Havana location.

My mom hates me and my dad loves me. When she bought clothes, she only bought for my small sister. She can go to town with my sister and she will just say I must stay in the house. Sometimes I feel cross, but now I don't care.

My father loves me. My father bought clothes for both of us and my father told me that God is the only one. My father is working at Lewis and he uses to pay my school fund. I just thank God because my father uses to help me.

One day my mother was drinking a cool drink and someone put paraffin in the cup. When she asked us, we said we don't know. She started blaming me and insulting me. When my father came from work I explained what happened and he said he will do something.

When I come back home from school my mother uses to say that I have to go to sell fish and bread at the market. That's why sometimes I don't do my homework, even in the examination time. When I tell my mom that it is examination time, she only says I must go with the book to the market.

Now I don't have a shirt, shoes and a skirt, because my skirt is old.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

We must learn how to treat those who are having the virus. Some people think that it is not good to stay with someone who has HIV because he/she will be also infected with the virus. I feel very bad for those who are infected.

Some people are treating those who have HIV unfairly. Some people are even blaming, insulting and gossiping about these people. Sometimes people are born with the virus. But if you are serious with your tablets, you will be ok.

I would make those who are infected feel better about themselves.

“These are my manners”

Fillipus, Grade 6

Who takes care of me?

My name is Fillipus. I am schooling at Havana Primary School. I am in Grade 6. My father uses to take care of me as we are two brothers and two sisters. I just stay with my father in Windhoek and my stepmother.

When I am at the North, I stay with my mother just some weeks, and then I go to my father's house in the North.

All my parents take care of me. My father uses to beat me, for example when he told me to do something that I did not do. He will punish me. My father teaches me manners and how to respect all people who are not children, like all the parents in Namibia.

I use to clean my father's house. We stay in a *kambashu* [simple hut]. My stepmother teaches me how to cook food. When my father comes back home, when he is tired, he finds all the work done by me.

My mother teaches me to help people. For example, when I find a person washing dishes, I will just say “Let me wash for you”, or when I see a person who cannot walk, I will help him/her. These are my manners, for all Namibians.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

There are many people who are infected with the HIV virus. I am very sad because some people who do not have HIV, they are laughing about the people who have it.

Like in our community, there are people who have HIV. Some people use to have a condom when they are having sex. But when the person drinks too much beer, he/she will forget that he/she must use a condom.

“I use to cook at home”

Seigeria, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

At home, I stay with my father, only he takes care of me. I’m schooling at Havana Primary School. I’m a girl of 12 years and I like my English teacher, she is so beautiful. I like her very much because she doesn’t beat learners when she is teaching. She uses only to beat when learners are making noise, or when we are doing wrong things.

At home, my father likes me too, he takes care of me. I’m the only child in the house. I use to cook at home. When my father comes from work, he will find me cooking. My mother comes to visit us sometimes.

When I come home from school, I take a bath because I want to be clean and healthy. I want to achieve my goal to be a doctor because I want to help my family and other people when they are ill. I want to pass Grade 6 so that I can go to the next grades until Grade 12.

If I pass Grade 6, my father said that he will buy for me a laptop. I don’t want to have a phone before I turn 14 years old because, when you have a phone, you might drop out of school, just because of the phone. The phone is not good at this age because you will even fail.

When my father gets paid, he doesn’t use to eat up the money, he pays my school fund first, 200 Namibian dollars.

When I pass a grade, I go to my mother and visit her and show her my report that I passed. That’s how my parents take care of me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When my family or one of the neighbours is having a virus, I feel very afraid because maybe they will die and it’s not good to die. You will lose your family and your friends if you have a virus, and you will not feel good – you will feel bad.

If you have a virus, most of your friends or your family members will not stay with you. I feel pity for those people. I feel like I’m the one who is having that virus with them because it’s not good to have the virus.

If you have a virus, please do not drink alcohol. You need to eat only food that you are allowed to eat. If I am a doctor, I will help those people who are having the virus, and I will tell them not to drink alcohol. They must eat fruits and vegetables and drink water.

“They named me Big Voice”

Selma, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was small, I heard that I was so naughty that I was speaking with a big voice. They even named me Big Voice and I hated that name people used to call me.

My mother and my father were still together. We were even staying in a *shebeen* [bar] where we used to live. My mother had only two children at that time, my big sister and me. But then my sister started late with school because she was staying in the North. She came to Windhoek where she started school.

In 2006, my mother gave birth to a girl again, so we are three girls. I never wanted my mother to give birth to another child, so I was angry and used to beat my small sister. My mother loved my little sister, and I was so jealous.

In 2007, I started schooling at Havana Primary School, before I was schooling at Olof Palme Primary School. When my mother heard that a new school will be built, she told me not to go to Olof Palme because she already applied for me at the new school. I was so happy, but I did not know to which school I will go. In 2007, I started at Havana in Grade 2 and my teacher was Ms Hamukoto, but then she left and went to teach at the North.

We were a family, my mother, father, me and my two sisters. My mother has only three daughters. She was not married to my father. My father has many women and many daughters and sons. Some I know, some I don't know. But he loves my mother more than other women. My father and my mother are taking care of us. I use to go to my father's village every time when the school is closed. We used to eat dog meat at the North that time. I liked dog meat, but then I realised that it smells bad.

My mother used to work at RAMATEX FACTORY, and my father works in a BUILT IT FACTORY, and they use to buy for us good things, nice food, clothes and shoes. My father had many houses and cars, but he sold the car and has only one house now.

In 2009, I was so naughty that I liked to go to Sam Nujoma Stadium, where I was going with my friend. That stadium is named after our founding president, and a lot of people are also going there. To the stadium, we go for free with buses. I loved going there and I enjoyed.

In 2011, my mother and my father broke up because my father used to drink alcohol too much. My father never wanted to eat, but I forced him. He used to beat my mother and us, and so my mother started working hard and built a new house for us. My father did not know where the house was, but my sister showed him. Now my parents are no longer together.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was in Grade 5, at this time, I heard about HIV/AIDS. People never wanted us to know about HIV/AIDS. They said that no small kids or learners are allowed to know about this virus. Children were even afraid to discuss about this academic virus. I heard that many people died because of HIV/AIDS.

In school, we learned that there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, but there are prolonging pills.

I heard that my uncle died because of HIV/AIDS. I wish he was still alive. I feel so sad to hear about that.

These days, many people and children learn about this disease. People talk in many ways about this disease. Some people say that it's a punishment from God. Other people say that someone has made sex with a monkey and others say more.

I was even having a friend, who was infected with HIV/AIDS. I felt sorry for her. People used to gossip about her and said bad things to her, but I was always at her side.

“I used to stay with donkeys in the bush”

Ndinelao, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

My family takes care of me since I was young. When I was five years old, I was schooling in the North and my grandmother used to take care of me because my mother went to Windhoek to look for a job.

When my mother got a job, she told my granny. My grandmother took care of me since my mother went. She took care of me by feeding me, taking me to school, washing my clothes and doing many more things. The problem was that I was the only child and I had no one to play with. That time I used to be lonely and bored. When I came back from school I used to find my grandmother cooking so that I could eat.

My grandmother was having a problem with her right leg. She couldn't walk a long distance. So I used to go and fetch water and firewood so that we can cook and wash my clothes. I used to stay with donkeys in the bush near the house. Sometimes I used to think about my mother and then I would start to cry. I was screaming that I want my mother back. I have been in such situation.

When I was seven years old, my mother came to get me so that we can go back to Windhoek. When my mother came, I was very happy. After two days, we went to Windhoek and I left my grandmother alone in the house. In Windhoek, I was staying with both of my parents. I started at Tobias P.S. I was schooling there from Grade 1 to 2. After that, I failed Grade 2 and my parents were no more staying together.

My mother heard that there is a school in Havana and she decided that I am going to school there because it was where she got another man. Now I stay with my mother at that house and they are taking care of me. My stepfather is a good man. One day, while I was playing with my friend, a woman was looking for children who need help. That woman wrote my name. I was sponsored by Family of Hope Services and they are paying my school fees. I was very happy. That's how my parents and Family of Hope take care of me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was 12 years old, I heard people saying that there is HIV/AIDS killing people. That time I was very shocked because I was thinking maybe I am one of them. My parents told me more about HIV and how to take care of people who have it.

I was having my friend, called Nany. Nany was my best friend. I didn't want to lose her. She told me that her parents are both infected with HIV. She used to cry sometimes, saying her parents will die and no one will take care of her.

I used to advise her that people with HIV will not just die like that. They will die if they are not taking their ARVs. I told her that ARVs are medicine that prolongs the life of people with HIV and she understood me. Her parents did not die.

“HIV does not mean hate someone”

Leonald, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

From when I was a baby up to four years old, I stayed with my mother in Walvis Bay. She used to take me to my uncle while she was going to work. When she came from work, she used to bring for me some toys. She also used to give me chocolate. At that time, I did not know my father at all. I only saw him on a photo.

When I turned five years old, my mother decided to take me to Windhoek. She got work at Ramatex. She always brought me some T-shirts. My mother liked going to visit my uncle. She used to give me beer when she was drinking.

I enjoyed playing soccer with my two friends Katanga and Shalongo. At that time, I did not think of school. When I saw people coming from school, wearing the same school uniform, I thought they are twins. One day my mother told me that the following year I will go to school. I was surprised because I was never told about school before.

When I turned six years old in 2005, my father came to get me from my mother. It was Friday. I only just went to sleep when my father woke me up - the sun almost set. I did not want to wake up. When I woke up, the people in the house already started to eat. I didn't want to eat, and then my father sent my uncle to get a cold drink, so that he will pay it the next day because at that time we had a small store. I only drank the cool drink and I went back to sleep. The only thing I thought of was my mother.

I started school while I was with my father. In 2006, I was in Grade 1. By that time, I liked going to school. The only problem I had was that I did not have a school nearby. My father used to take me along when he was going to work.

When I was eight years old, I came to Havana Primary School. I still live with my father.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Growing up in this world of HIV/AIDS, almost everyone has his/her own experience.

On 10th of March 2009, I was told that my cousin was infected with HIV. By that time, I did not know much about the virus. When I grew up, I was told about it at school.

I used to tease my cousin always when I went to visit him. My father used to tell me not to tease him, but I did it. Now I use to give him some advice. I hated him before, but now I love him. When people ask me “What is his problem?” I don't like to tell them because I know they will tease him.

I hated talking to him, but now I changed. HIV does not mean hate someone.

“One day, my mother started to feel sick”

Phillipus, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

I was born in 1999 on 26th of April. My mother was 32 years old and my father was 42, so my mother told me. When I was five, my father and my mother divorced. My father told my mother that he is going to stay with me for five years, so my mother agreed to what my father said, and he took me and sent me to the North.

A month passed. Then my mother called my father and told him that he must not abuse me. My father said, “Ok, I will not abuse our child.” Then my mother said, “It’s not our child, it’s my child,” then they started to argue.

After two years, my mother went to the North to pick me up to go to the city of Windhoek. There I started school when I was seven.

My mother and my father started to argue because they wanted to choose a school for me, so I went there and said, “Mama, papa, I will choose my own school.” Then my father took me outside and started beating me with a belt and said, “Never come and talk like that when I and your mother talk.”

I chose a bad school. There was a lot of *bolis* [bullies]. I only schooled there at Grad 1, then I went to a good school called Havana Primary School. My big brother took me there. One day I realised that my parents they were just doing this for me. That’s why I wrote this topic “Who takes care of me?”

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I was born on 26th of April, 1999. My mother was 32 and my father was 42. My mother and father told me that I am HIV-positive. I was born free, the war ended in 1990, that was when my third sister was born. I have four brothers and three sisters, so we are ten in the house.

My father died when I was three years old in 2003. So still my mother did not tell us that we have HIV and AIDS. Before my father died, he did not tell my mother that he has HIV and AIDS. So my father’s brother was the only person who knew that he was HIV-positive.

One day, our uncle came to our house to tell us, but at that day we were not there, so he only told my mother. My mother did not tell us, she only kept quiet. One day, my mother started to feel sick, so we took our mother to the clinic. The doctor told my mother that she was HIV-positive. She kept quiet, then she told us one day. That is how I know.

“She was stoned to death”

Fabian, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was three years old, my father passed away. My grandmother took me so that I could stay with her. After one month, my mother went to Windhoek and she left me in the North. My grandmother was treating me in a good way, but if you make her angry, she will beat you like nobody's business.

Then I started pre-primary school at Epandule Primary School. Four years later, I started Grade 1 in Oshakati. After one year, my mother came back from Windhoek. That year I was in Grade 2. My mother took me away from that school because it was too far. She took me to a school called Ehenye Primary School, also in Oshakati.

The day when I went there, I was so quiet like never before. I got a friend called Jacob, he was my best friend in the world and I got many other friends. Some of them are not coming with food to school and you must give them when you come with bread. In December, when the school closed, my friend Jacob passed number one and I passed number four.

After three years, my mother took me away from my grandmother and she took me with her to Windhoek. She found for me a school that is called Havana Primary School, it was in our location. I got many friends and every day I used to play soccer with them. When I started at Havana Primary School, I was supposed to go in Grade 6, but there was no Grade 6 in Oshindonga [learner's mother tongue], so my mother said, “You must go in Grade 5.”

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Since 1998, people remember that HIV/AIDS is taking place in Namibia. In 1998 one girl that was having HIV/AIDS was stoned to death because she was having HIV/AIDS. She was thinking that the people from the community would give her advice, but the people killed her because they were afraid to get HIV/AIDS and that was there where I was born.

Since then, people have learned that they must give advice.

“I will see how we are going to survive”

Ester, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

My parents take good care of me. I am very proud to have my two parents. I thank God for protecting my whole family. My parents take care of me, although they are not working.

I and my parents live in Windhoek and I school at Havana. My mother talks to the school in order to get sponsors for me from the Family of Hope Services where we get food sometimes. My father started working yesterday, and I will see how we are going to survive.

My teachers are very proud of me and sometimes bring me food. During holidays I look for a holiday job to earn some money.

In 2009, I subjugated learners from Olof Palm Primary School in running. I was the first one and came home with N\$200, while I gave N\$300 to the school. With N\$200 I bought food for my family.

Sometimes we go to the dump site to take food, because you can't earn a living without food. My mother gets drunk every day and beats me. I feel very sad to have such a mother.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV is a virus and AIDS is a disease. Nobody knows where HIV and AIDS came from. HIV is transmitted in different ways. There are myths about HIV/AIDS. Some people say HIV comes from monkeys, when a person slept with a monkey and got infected.

HIV affects all people in the world. It can be transmitted from a mother to a newborn baby. This means that if a mother has the virus, when she is bearing the baby, it can get infected. Through breast feeding, when the baby is fed and when the baby bites the breast, it will be infected.

People who are affected should take care of their patients, otherwise they will die. Many people are infected, they don't have anybody to take care of them.

You need to go to the hospital when you are HIV-positive and get tested because you cannot say whether the person is infected or not by looking at their shape. Be tested. Know your status. Take your pills on time.

“When she collected enough money, she called me to come to live in Windhoek”

Peneyambeko, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

Since I was born, my mother was taking good care of me, and my father run away when I was one year old. She was taking good care of me until I started Grade 1 at the northern side. She pays my school fees, although she is not working. She struggles to pay my fees, but she knows that if I finish my schooling, I will be a better person and obviously I will help her.

When I was in Grade 1, my father called me to go for a holiday. My mother took me there, and I only spend there one day when my mother just heard that I was in the hospital. She was crying the whole day and she came and collected me to go home. Until now I have never been back at my father's house. I keep on asking my mother to take me to father, but she always says “No.”

When I got older, my mother started working in Windhoek. When she collected enough money, she called me to come to live in Windhoek. She struggled to find a school for me, but she got a place for me at Havana Primary School. I started Grade 3 and I am now in Grade 7.

When I came to Windhoek, I started school in February 2008, and I was so shy of other learners that I spent a long time without any friends. I used to stay alone at break time, I was eating alone and I did not play, I was only playing at home. I was used to playing with Damara boys. When a few months passed, I met a friend called Leonard and he used to walk home with me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I was born on 29th of December and my father was 25 years old and my younger brother was infected with HIV and AIDS. And when I was young, they did not tell me that he was infected with HIV and AIDS. I was so afraid of my brother having a disease that I thought I was also having the disease. But my mother told me that I don't have it because I was the firstborn, so I cannot have it.

So I started treating him nicely, showing him love, and we play together as brother and brother. We used to go to the swimming pool together and we go playing soccer together. He also saw that I was showing him love.

We also used to do homework at home. And at school, we sit together at the same desk.

I love my brother. Because he is HIV-positive, I am not feeling good about that. I will never hate my brother. Never. I love him very much.

“We do not eat every day”

Amadhila, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

Who takes care of me are my mother and father. My mother gives me things like food to eat. I also love my mother because she gives me things that I want. She takes care of me. When I was small, she also washed me until when I was five years old.

When I was 7 years old, I was staying at my father's house until when I was in Grade 3. My father was taking care of me and my mother was in the North. I was with my father in Namibia.

When I was with my father, we went to visit my mother in the North, in Angola, on 5th of September 2010. And I came back to Namibia with my mother and my father.

My father and my mother are now taking care of me, paying my school fees, paying T-shirt for me and soccer shoes. That was my story of taking care.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In 2008, I was told that my mother is HIV-positive. By that time, I was 13 years old. I was in Grade 6, schooling at Havana Primary School. My mother was taking care of me. My father was not having work anymore and also my mother was not having work anymore.

And we did not eat every day because there was no money to pay for food to eat. And my mother started to sell things so that people can buy food and we get money to buy food and also to buy my school uniform.

I passed my Grade 5 and I went to Grade 6. Then my father got work and my father was happy when he got work. He is paying for my school fees and he takes care of me. And I passed my Grade 6 and went in Grade 7 and I am now 15 years old. This was my story, my experiences with regard to growing up in times of AIDS.

“They don’t take care of themselves”

Festus, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

Back to the days when I was one year old, I was living with my grandfather in the North, my mother’s father. I lived there for more than five years. My mother stayed in the city with my dad.

Around 2006, my grandfather died and my father brought me to the city. At that time, my mother and my father got separated. Since then, I have been staying with my dad up to now.

I started school in the city late because for the first year I did not get a place at any school. I waited for the next year when I started in Grade 2 at Havana Primary School, which was the year it was opened.

My father keeps on staying with me and helps me with all my needs. He always liked it when I passed and he takes me to town and buys me anything I want.

I visited my mom sometimes in the holidays. She didn’t like it when I visited her only for a few days, every time she tells me that I should stay with her for more days. When the December holiday comes, I will go to my dad’s house in the North.

In the year 2008, when I went to Grade 3, my dad went to South Africa because of his company. I stayed with my uncle. He always told me that whenever I come from school, I must find the food in the fridge because he never allowed me to cook. I lived with my uncle until my dad came back. He came in November. He came back for the holiday and we went to Swakopmund. It was very good there. We went to the coast and had fresh air for the hot weather. We had a very nice holiday that year, and we went back to Windhoek when the holiday was over.

The following year, I was in Grade 4. My dad bought for me all school stationeries and he brought me to school every day and fetched me when the school was out.

Growing up, I realised things that are good and bad, so I told my dad that I should visit my mom sometimes. So my dad didn’t want me to stay with my mother for a long time. If I go and visit my mom’s place and stay a long time, he will come and take me back.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In 2010, when I was in Grade 5, I learned more about HIV/AIDS. In my community, most people still don’t understand much about the virus. They discriminate and stigmatise people who are living with the disease. In my case, I know more facts and the danger of the disease. So I tell my adults what I know and advise them to transport the message to others. Most people don’t care about other people who live with HIV, they don’t take care of themselves.

In my street, there was a boy who was infected by the mother from the birth, and at the same time the mother passed away, so he never saw his mother. Some boys didn’t like to play with him. I told them to stop and to be friendly with him, so they thought that I’m wrong. But as the years keep on going, they realised that what they were doing was wrong.

So please don’t treat people with HIV/AIDS badly. They will feel lonely or not equal to other people.

“She wanted me, my sister and my cousin to get infected by the disease”

Helena, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

My name is Helena and I am in Grade 7. When I was ten years, I was living with my grandmother. In 2006, she passed away and my mother and father took me. From then, I stayed with my mother and father for three years.

When three years passed, my father passed away. That time I was at school. When I came home, I found my mom crying. Before I even greeted her, she took water and sugar and gave it to me and I went to go to watch television. Maybe after a minute, I asked mom, “Why are you crying?” The next day I did not go to school because my father died.

Three years passed when my mom went to Oranjemund for training. That time I was not happy because my mom liked me so much and from there my aunty took me to her home. There was no electricity. When I woke up in the morning, I was calling my mom. I went to the kitchen to go and eat. I went to the gas, I was thinking it is a microwave, but it was not. SO THAT WAS SO BAD FOR ME!!!

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In 2008, I heard that my aunty has HIV/AIDS. Once she wanted me, my sister and my cousin to get infected by the disease. She was eating with a spoon and she gave it to me without washing it. I told her that I am full. And she said “call your sister and your cousin to come and eat with my spoon”. I asked her, “Aunty, what do you want to do?” and she answered me bad, like “What do I have to do to you, stupid?”

One year passed, and then the family came to tell her what to do. One day, my uncle brought for me an apple and I gave it to my aunty because I knew that she has HIV and AIDS. Two weeks passed when my uncle took her to the hospital for a testing. When the doctor told her that she had HIV and AIDS, she said she will go to the witch doctor, which means traditional doctor.

“This disease is eating people”

Suamo, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was young, about six years old, my mother was in Windhoek. At that time when she went to Windhoek, I was four years old. My mother’s sister was the one who was taking care of me. She sent me to my father’s house to go for the holiday.

When I went there, there were many children in that house, and then I decided to go back to my mother’s house because those children, they were all bigger than me. I thought they will beat me. But my father didn’t want me to go back.

When my mother was about to come home, I decided to go there because I heard that my mother was coming soon. When my father was out of the house, I went to my mother's house. My father phoned the people at the house. I didn't want to go back, but the people kept on saying that I must go.

The day I went was the day when my mother came. I was very happy to see her. She bought for me toys and new clothes. The next day we went to town and bought food to eat. When we were there, I told my mother to buy a bicycle for me. She said, "I will just add for you some money, because the bicycle is very expensive and some money you will get from your father." I was jumping. Until now I have that new bicycle.

In 2007, I came to Windhoek to my mother. I started Grade 2 at Havana P.S. Now, I am under my mother's responsibility.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was in the North at our village, at that time I went for holiday to the North, I heard that our neighbour is dead because of the disease called HIV/AIDS. At that time, I was eight years old.

HIV/AIDS is a very dangerous disease because it cannot leave you alive. But nowadays, the people protect themselves by using a drug called ARV. It does not take the virus out of your body, but it's prolonging your life.

Years ago, people were dying because of this disease. But nowadays, more people are dying in a car accident because they did not look for a right place to drink their ARVs.

HIV and AIDS is all over the world. The people keep on discussing about this disease because it is eating people. Our neighbour is already dead for many years. He rests in peace.

"Condoms are just to enjoy, they want babies"

Immanuel, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

The persons who take care of me are both of my parents. When I was in Grade 1, I was schooling in the North, staying with my mother, while my father was in Windhoek. When I passed my Grade 1, my father said I must come to school in Windhoek.

In that time, my father did not get a school for me, so he went to Keetmanshoop and got a hostel for me and my sister. They accepted me at that hostel, and we went there with a train.

When we were there in March, there was no food at the hostel because the principal ate up the money and we were hungry, so children started eating anything. When our parents heard about this, they came and were taking us away from there and we were just at home. We did not go to school. Because it was in the middle of the school year, my father got a school here. Now I am in Grade 7, while I am supposed to be in Grade 8.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

AIDS only infects those people who do not listen because every time people are just having sex without a condom and that is not safe. Condoms are made to be used.

But people are not using them. Some people know already that they are infected with the virus, but they are just having sex, infecting other people who are not having the virus.

Many children lost their parents because of this disease. Some people say that condoms are just to enjoy, they want babies, but they are infecting others.

The disease comes also from those who don't listen to their parents. They are just going out with infected people and have sex, and after sex the person is telling the other that he/she is infected with the virus.

“She got pregnant and got HIV and AIDS”

Thomas, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

I have been taken care of by my father, mother and grandmother. When I was two years old, I was taken by my grandmother from my father and my mother. When I went to the North with my grandmother, I was put in a nearby school, where I went to Grade 1 and 2.

When I finished Grade 2, my mother took me to Okahandja to my father. In Okahandja, they took me to a school which was in town. When I went to that school, it was a school of white people. At that school, I just did Grade 3 and 4.

Then, my mother took me to Windhoek. I am schooling here for three years now, I am in Grade 7 at Havana Primary School. When I was in Grade 6, my mother went to the North and came with my big sister to Windhoek to go to school in Windhoek.

When my sister came from the North, my stepfather said I must go to my father, because I am a boy and my sister needs to stay with my mother because she's a girl. Then my mother said that if he wants me to go, he's the one who needs to go.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV/AIDS – this disease can kill thousand people at one time. In our family, there is a girl who is infected with HIV and that girl is naughty.

When the girl was in the North, my mother bought for me a teddy bear, when I was in the hospital when my arm was broken, and my mother decided to go to get Sara from the North.

My mother took Sara, she was 19 years old, to Windhoek, that is a city of Windhoek that is having thieves. My mother said to Sara that she must not be with boys and Sara said, “Okay”. Then Sara started dating a boy and she got pregnant and got HIV and AIDS.

“He must go for peace”

Rosalina, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was a baby, my mother was taking care of me, while my father was working. But when I was small, my father never came to me.

When I was four years old, my father came to visit me and he asked me to go with him and I said “Yes”. But when he arrived at our house, I was saying I must go back to my mother. When we reached a take away bar, I started crying and I told my father to bring me back home. He said, “No” and I said, “Yes” and then he said, “Ok, I will take you back”.

After two years, he came to visit me. I said, “What did you bring for me?” He said, “Sweets”. He asked me if I am going to another school. I said, “No, I will school here until I finish my school.” He said, “Ok”.

After four years, he told me that I am going to school at Windhoek. I said, “Ok”. That time only my mother was in Windhoek, and I was staying with my lovely grandmother and my cousin, my mother’s sister, my grandfather and brother. My father told me he will come and tell me when I am going and he promised, but he never came.

When I was in Grade 4, he told me on the phone that he looks for a school for me and I said, “I will come then.” He said, “Ok, you will find your sister here,” and I said “Ok”.

In the next year, he told my mother’s sister to come with me and my mother’s sister said “I promise I will come with her.” But she never came with me, and my father asked, “Are you coming?” She said, “Yes”, but my father waited for so long.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When my uncle was at the age of 24, he got infected with HIV. But the day he got infected, he never told people. The next day, he told someone to whom he trusted, but he told him, “You must not tell anyone,” and he went to the hospital.

My father went to visit him. But he did not tell my father that he was infected. But my father was forcing him and he started crying and he told him. Then my father didn’t want to stay with him. Someone told me that my father said, “I don’t want to stay with him,” and he said, “He must not use our toilet.”

But I told my father that HIV is a disease that can kill you if you are not doing what the doctor says. He said he will never be infected by that disease. I told him, “Come down and listen to me”. He came down and I said “This person will use the toilet and stay here whether you like it or not.” I said that if you are not going to allow it, I will allow it. I went to my uncle who is infected with HIV and I told him that I talked to my father and I said, “You will stay there, whether he likes it or not”. He said “Ok”. I gave him peace and love and he said “Thank you.”

After two months he was ok. He came back home and said, “Thank you, I will go for peace”. I told him, “Don’t worry, I will come and visit you.” My father started crying and told me that I must call him, but I said, “No, he must go for peace”.

“My mother and my father are still the ones who take care of me”

Salomo, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was in the North, my mother and my father were alive and they were the ones who took care of me there. I am 13 now and, as I am standing here, my mother and my father are still the ones who take care of me and feed me every day before I go to school every morning. They also buy for me clothes. They are the ones who bought for me my school uniform, and every year they pay my school fees before the school closes.

When I came from the North, they paid for me so that I could get into the bus, and they also bought for me food and cool drinks so that I could eat when I was hungry and drink when I was we say, “and thanks for letting us go to the North, we thank you a lot.”

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I know someone has HIV and AIDS, I will take care of him and I will support him by playing together or eating together. But when I see him/her bleeding, I will wear plastic gloves before I can help him/her. When a girl wants me to have sex with her, I must use a condom.

My father told me that my older sister has HIV and he started crying. I did not sleep very well that night. In the morning, they just said let's go to visit my sister at the clinic and we went. I took a photo and I took a camera phone and gave it to her. The doctor told us also to come and visit her tomorrow.

The next morning when we came to the hospital, we greeted the doctor and the doctor also greeted us one by one. We asked the doctor, “Is our sister feeling very well?” and the doctor said, “Yes, she is feeling very well,” and the doctor said, “You must go to her”. We all went to her, we greeted her and she also greeted us.

I asked her, “Are you drinking your ARVs?” and she answered, “Yes, I always drink them on time, the doctor always reminds me, the doctor also brought for me water so that I can drink my ARVs on time.”

My mother said, “Don't you want to drink milk?” She answered, “I want milk,” and my mother gave me money to buy milk at the nearest Shoprite. I ran as fast as I could, I paid the money and came back. I gave the milk to my sister and she drank it very fast.

“One day when I got HIV/AIDS”

Maria, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

Until I was one year old I was in the North. I was living with my mother, my father, my two brothers and my grandmother. That time my grandfather was already dead. My mother got married and after marriage, my parents made their own house. That time I was a small child.

Then my father passed away. After he passed away, we were going away from that house, and we all went to our grandmother's house. From there my mother went to Windhoek so that she could look for work and help us. Since I was two until I was 11 years old, my grandmother started helping us like we were her own children.

In my grandmother's house there was my mother's sister. That sister of my mother was having four children. One child was very small and I was the only person who used to stay with her child. Always when I came from school that woman would just tell me that I must eat and after eating I must come and stay with her child. If I would say I have got homework, she would say that I must go and do that homework at school.

One day I came from school before her children came from school. Her children were just playing on the way, they are two boys and one girl. When I came, she said I must go and look for the goats, and she put her child on my back and she said I must run. I couldn't run because her child was very fat, so she beat me with a stick on my legs and then I fell down and I started crying.

When my mother used to come and visit us, I used to tell her the story from A-Z. After a few days, my mother said that I will no more stay in the North. This was when I was 12. Now I am with my mother nicely in our house and she is just working a simple work.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Ever since I have HIV/AIDS my friends stay with me always, even though I have HIV/AIDS.

One day when I got HIV/AIDS, I told my mother that I am HIV-positive and she said “Where did you get that disease?” and I said “I really don't know, mom.” She said “Thank you, my child, you must go and tell your friend that you have HIV/AIDS.”

The next day when I went to school, I was telling my friend that I'm HIV-positive. Then my friend said that she will never leave me because there is no one who can be my best friend at this school. I said, “Thank you my friend,” and we were so happy. Our friendship never ends. We always play together and we eat together and we exercise together.

“One day I found her under a tree crying”

Shigweda, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

Since I was a baby until when I was eight years old, my grandmother took care of me because my mother passed away. My grandmother kept on taking care of me. I was proud of my grandmother when I heard all those stories.

When I was six years old, I started school in the North and my grandmother started getting sick. When she went to the hospital, she was very sick. After a few days we saw a car coming from the road because we were in the trees, looking for animals not to go in the *mahangu* [pearl millet] field. We saw our grandmother coming out of the car. We run to her and she was very well. We were very happy because our granny was the one who was taking care of us.

When I was nine years my grandmother passed away. Then no one was taking care of us. My father came and took me from the North to Windhoek and we are staying here. I started Grade 2 at Havana Primary School.

When I came here, some people treated me badly, but my father didn't care. The following day, those who were treating me badly came to my father asking for some money to go to buy food for themselves. My father said, “No. I cannot give you money because you were treating my own child badly. From today on, I will teach you a lesson.”

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

One day I was playing with my friends, we were four. We were walking when one of my friends told me that one girl was HIV-positive. I was confused because I could not believe it. We went home to eat, and I was thinking if that was true what my friend was telling me. After finishing eating, we went to play again.

That girl, she is always quiet, every time she is very quiet. When she was quiet, I called her to come alone with me. I said, “Is it true that you are positive?” and she said, “Yes, I am.” I was asking her if she is taking her pills on time, she said, “Yes,” but the problem is that her aunt is very rude. She is always treating the girl badly because the girl is an orphan – she doesn't have her parents.

One day I found her under a tree crying. I asked her what happened and she said, “My aunt was beating me and swearing, but I did not do anything to her.” She said her aunt was swearing at her because her mother has died and she doesn't bring anything home.

I felt like saying, “You must just come and stay in our house because how can your aunt treat you like that.”

“I use to give her the pills at the right time”

Saima, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

I was born in the North in 1999. I grew up in Oshikoto Region, at Ondjamba. My mother was looking after me when I was in the North. She used to wash me and to buy for me clothes and food.

I started school in the North. I was there from Grade 1 until Grade 3. When I started school, I did not fail, but pass. I was happy sometimes, but not every day.

When we came from school, we went to fetch water and collected wood and came back and cooked. We didn't get time to do our homework. We woke up in the morning to go to work in the field. After that we went to school, but the school was near our house.

When I was 10 years old, my mother's sister heard that I am going to school. She came to the North and we went to Windhoek. I started schooling at Havana Primary School in Windhoek.

When we first came to Windhoek, she was looking after us for a year. We used to stay with her children. Those children, they didn't love me, they did things so that their father came and beat us. Even though you were not the one who did anything, you were beaten. Sometimes the man was buying bread and said to us, “You will not get bread. You must go to school with the porridge.”

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

My friend was having HIV/AIDS. She used to go to the hospital with me to get her pills. After that we were going to bath and she was drinking her pills. We used to go to the park and enjoy swimming. After we came back, we went to our house and I was cooking and we were eating.

Every day, when we are going to sleep, we use to pray. We use to go to the church with her. She likes going to church every day.

I use to give her the pills at the right time so that she will not become sick. I use to go and buy for her fruits so that she will be healthy. She loves me and I love her. We play together, we eat together, we jump together, we sleep together.

“I like to eat too much”

Elma, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

My aunt took care of me since I was two years old, according to my mom. She said when I went to her that I like to eat too much and I cannot have a day without eating and she said that that time she could work.

When I was told to go to my father, that time I was nine years old. I could not believe that they think that I like to eat too much. I was telling my father, “These are lies what you and my mom are telling me.” My father said, “How can you say this to me?” and he was beating me with a stick, then I started crying.

And when I was ten years old, my grandmother did a care assessment. At that time, my mother was in the hospital, she was sick. From that time, my aunt started beating me, saying that I must go to my mother. From then on, she didn't like me and I didn't go with food to school.

Now I moved out of her house. I live in my brother's house, and now I use to come with food to school, and my brother likes me and I like him too.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

One day when we were coming from school, my friend fell down and she was bleeding, and I wanted to clean her, but one of my friends told me that I may not touch the blood because HIV/AIDS is around. I couldn't believe it, but my friend said it continuously.

Then I went to my mother, asking if that is true that if you touch the blood you will get HIV/AIDS. Then my mother said, "Don't touch people's blood, even if it is your best friend, don't touch it, please, because the virus is around us."

Then my friend said, "That I was telling you, but you did not want to listen to me," and I said, "I am sorry that I was not believing you." Then I said, "You are a good friend that had a good advice for me."

The next day at school, we wanted to learn about HIV/AIDS. Now I can believe that HIV/AIDS is not a joke.

"When my brother was buried, I threw myself in the hole"

Alina, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was three years old, I was in Windhoek. My mother took me from the North. I started Pre-Primary School in Windhoek. My mother paid the School Development Fund.

In 2006, I was in Grade 1 and my grandmother passed away. In 2007, I went to the North. I went there to school in Grade 3, but my father didn't believe it. He took me to the North and went back to Windhoek.

My sister, she was sick in her early age. She was sick with a heart problem. My father went to the North to visit my sister in the hospital.

On 17th of July 2009, my grandfather passed away because of HIV/AIDS. I was at the North, I was schooling there in Grade 4 and 5. I came back to Windhoek to school my Grade 6 in 2011. My mother and my father paid my school fees. My mother bought for me school shoes and a school uniform.

My mother went to the North when I was seven years old. In 2006, she brought me to Havana Primary School. My brother said he will never leave school.

My sister's brother went to South Africa and my cousin went to Walvis Bay. Each holiday he comes and visits me. My father buys me some clothes and shoes.

After two years, my mother went to the hospital to go and get her ARVs. My brother went to the hospital too. He went and passed away. When my brother was buried, I threw myself in the hole. My father was taking me out.

I was crying because my brother passed away. "HIV is not the end of the world," I used to tell him like that when I was talking with him. Now, my brother is already dead.

In the North again, I was just staying with my sister. She was beating me with the big sticks. She was beating me on my head and I went to the hospital for three days. I came back to Windhoek and my father was there and my mother was there.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Many people die because of HIV/AIDS. I just have some information about HIV/AIDS. People, I just want to tell you that it is not the end of the world. If you want to be not infected with this disease, you must not use anyone's needle. If you use someone's needle, this will happen to you.

People, you can live with this disease, just take your ARVs. You must follow the instructions of the doctor. Take your ARVs. It can prolong your life. Go to your nearest clinic and collect some information. The doctor/nurse will give you some information. Take that information and follow it too. You must go to test and wait for the answer.

HIV/AIDS started in 1980. Some people say that HIV came from the monkey. Some people believe that HIV is a punishment from God because of our behaviour. No one knows when the world will end. No one knows where HIV came from.

In 2007, my cousin got HIV and AIDS. She went to the clinic to get some information and she got the ARVs. She drinks it early in the morning and when she is going to sleep. ARVs prolong her life up to now. Just drink HIV ARVs.

HIV doesn't have medicine. You can't find the tablets named HIVAIDS tablets. Some people cry, "I am going to die." No, that's not the end of the world.

"My cousin was the one who again bought for me shoes and uniform"

Laina, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was a baby, my mother was in the North. My mother died while I was in the North with her and also with my family. When my mother died many years ago, I was very small. I did not even know how to talk, I was just a small child. I was in a region called Omusati region. It is where I grew up.

When my mother passed away, I didn't know that she died until my grandmother told me. Before my mother died, she told my grandmother that she should tell me that my father also died. My

grandmother, she was the one who was taking care of me when I was a small baby. But when I grew up, my cousin took me to Windhoek.

My cousin took me to Windhoek where I started school. I started to work hard so that I can also help my cousin. I also studied hard. I started my school in Windhoek in 2007, when this school just opened. By now, I'm in Grade 7, I didn't fail. Next year, I will go to High School that is called Hage Geingob High School. I did apply at that school.

When my cousin took me to Windhoek, I started school in Grade 2. We were in one class with all my schoolmates. This year, my cousin was the one who again bought for me shoes and uniform. I really want to thank for what she has done for me for many years and also this year. She did it for the sickness of my mother.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Many years ago, my grandmother told me that her child was having HIV/AIDS, and she also told me that I should not go in this type of situation like her child was going through. At that time, I was a little baby when my mother died. My mother died of HIV/AIDS. I didn't know that HIV/AIDS is a virus that is killing people.

My grandmother said that her child, the one that was having HIV/AIDS, was my mother. Before I didn't know that my mother died of HIV/AIDS because she just used to drink alcohol, even when the doctor told her not to drink.

My grandmother said that she told me this because now I will be able to understand these things and it was her responsibility to tell me these things. She told me this to make me understand how my mother died. When I came to Windhoek, I started to know things like that, things like HIV/AIDS.

“Sometimes I was going with food and sometimes with no food”

Likius, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

I was born in 1998, and my mother was very ill when she gave birth to me. In 2000, my brother was born, and my mother and father sent me to the North to my uncle. When I was there, my uncle was having four kids, three boys and one girl.

In 2003, I started kinder garden. My uncle's children were going there with bags, and I was going with a plastic bag. Sometimes I was going with food and sometimes with no food.

When I went to Grade 1, I was the clever one and my uncle sometimes didn't want me to go to school. And me, because I was not a lazy boy, when he sent me to go and look after the cattle, I just woke up early in the morning and ran away to school. I told my mother about it.

In 2005, my father passed away and my mother became my guardian. My mother came with me to Havana Primary School and I was admitted. I became a learner of Havana Primary School. My mother is struggling to pay my school, but she tries hard because I am her firstborn.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In 2008, I was told by my mother that my aunt is HIV-positive, and one of my uncles said to my aunt that she will die. I told my aunt that this is not the end. My aunt was not happy with my uncle and I told her, “Don’t follow his opinions.”

Every day she needs to go and take her pills and her fruits. I go and exercise with her every day and she is just healthy. I’m playing games on her laptop, making tea for her, and I like her because when I ask for something and she has it, she will give it to me.

My aunt is going to work every day, no absenteeism, because she likes to go on holidays to Swakopmund and Oshakati. She likes to go with me every holiday and she bought for me a bicycle and shoes, my favorite ones.

“I don’t want then our friendship”

Loiso, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

My name is Loiso, I am in Grade 7. I was born in the North, in Eenhana hospital, but that time when I was born, my mother was still in school. She could not take care of me because she was in Grade 12.

My mother and I were living in the same house with my grandmother, who was always feeding me. After two months, my mother left me with my grandma.

My grandma was taking good care of me. She was really treating me good. She was feeding me and treated me in a very good way.

After six years, my grandmother decided to take me to school. She was paying my school fees and I schooled in Grades 1, 2 and 3 in the North.

After one year, my mother finished her school. She decided that I must come to school in Windhoek. Then I started Grade 4 at Havana Primary School.

After one year again, my granny passed away. We went there to the North and buried her.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I grew up in our house, there was an HIV-positive boy. He was four years old. He was born with the virus. His mother gave birth to him when she was positive, but at that time she was just breastfeeding her child because she did not know that the baby will be infected.

After two weeks only, his mother passed away. We loved that boy. At that time, there was no trouble, we were helping the boy and supporting him. We used to play and exercise with him, and we bought for him healthy food. We loved him just as we loved ourselves.

There were children living in our street who were teasing that positive boy and saying “Get out of our house, we don’t want to talk to HIV people because we will be infected like you, fool.” They also said, “We don’t want to see you nor play with you.” Then they told me that I should be no more staying with him, and I said “I don’t want then our friendship.” It was over that day.

“I was called names like ‘Four-Letter Girl’”

Rauha, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

According to my mom, when I was young, about two years old, she divorced from my father and that was a difficult thing because she was not working and then there was no one to support and take care of us. At the age of three, she left me with my father while she went further with her studies. My father got another wife and she was very rude to me. She did not wash me, she gave me little food and all this stuff.

One day my mother came to visit me and she found me very dirty with torn clothes and I was very thin, not as when she left. At that time, my grandmother was working as a clerk in the Ministry of Transport and Communication, so my mother decided to take me there without the knowing of my father.

When I came to Windhoek, I was four years old. My grandmother decided to take me to a kinder garden called Smart Kids. At that time, I was big enough to know that education is important. I learned very hard and I was very smart and I impressed my teachers.

When I was seven years old, my granny decided to register me at Grade 1 at Olof Palm Primary School, but they did not accept me, so I had to go back to Pre-Primary School. In 2006, when I turned eight years old, she went back to the school and they accepted me. That is the thing I will never forget in my life. In 2007, the government decided to build a school in Havana settlement because there were a lot of children who were going very far to school. My granny decided to take me there because it was so near to our house. Until now, I am at Havana Primary School and I am now a Grade 7 learner.

I would like to thank my grandmother for the good things she has done to me. If she wasn't there, I would not go to school.

I was supposed to be a Grade 8 learner this year, but, because of not getting a school early, I was left behind. But then, because of my granny, I am still schooling. I will thank her a lot of times for taking care of me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

My name is Rauha and I was born in 1998. I grew up with my grandmother. When I was small, my mother used to take me to a day care center. There was a woman who was HIV-positive and she used to take a needle and stick herself and me.

One day my granny discovered that I am not feeling well. She took me to a hospital and the doctor asked my granny if I can be tested, she said “Yes.” When she came back for the answer, I was tested HIV-positive.

My granny was shocked and she could not hold back her tears. The doctor took her to a counsellor. That time I was too small to know about it. When we went home, I told my granny that I don't want to go to that center anymore because there is a lady who is sticking herself and me with a needle. When she heard about it, she knew this was how I got the virus.

My granny took me to our family, and some of the family were kind to me while some were rude and that made me very sad. When I was 11 years old, I began to know more about the virus, and my granny talked to me so that I was not worried. In 2010, came the stigmatisation and discrimination. I was very shocked that even my own cousin did not want to talk to me or stay near to me.

My friends at school started staying away from me. I was called names like “Four-Letter Girl”, “Aidsicy” or something like that. Sometimes I used to be lonely or stay in my room crying, but my grandmother used to be there for me. I would like to tell people that sometimes the virus doesn’t come when you want, so let us stop discriminating other people. We must show love, care and all the good things.

“My mother and my father, they are now a better family”

Natalia, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

I was born in Windhoek. When I was small, my mother was the one who was taking care of me. We were staying at Ombili, and my father, he used to beat my mother and he used to go and drink alcohol. My father, he didn’t have time to take care of me.

When I was ten years old, I went to my grandmother, but I came back. I started Grade 1 in Windhoek. When I turned 12 years, my grandmother used to say I must go and stay with my father one day. I went to the North to visit him. He said “You are big now, my child,” we went with him.

One day I was very, very sick and my mother told my grandmother. My grandmother said that I must go to my father to stay with him, but my father, he said that I must not go to him.

Now my father doesn’t drink too much alcohol anymore because my grandmother, she told him that he must stop beating humans, “She is also a person like you, my dear.” Now he doesn’t beat my mom anymore.

I am 13 years old now, my mother and my father, they are now a better family, but the problem is that my father doesn’t pay school fees for me, it is my mom who is struggling to pay it sometimes. They only buy for the small ones clothes and shoes, but my father doesn’t buy it for me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

My neighbour was infected with HIV and AIDS. One day she was very sick, she could not even get up. From then on, she only used to sleep all day. One day she woke up and people were looking at her. She was very fat, but when she got sick she became very thin.

The same people were saying that she must go to the clinic, but she did not want to go to the hospital. She said that she won’t go to the hospital because she was afraid to die. People say that any time you can die.

Some people did not want to stay with her. When the people saw that person, they would go into the room and lock themselves in the room.

Some people, they loved her. In the mornings, one woman went to give her some fruits or tea. When she went to sleep, she ate vegetables. One person was saying to some woman, “If you are going to her, you must stop staying with us,” and the woman said, “I don’t care!!!”

“She bought for me everything I needed”

Linea, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

The person that took good care of me was my mother. She took care of me carefully. She bought for me everything I needed. That was when I was 4-6 years old. She also took me to a kinder garden, where I went to learn how to write and count.

From the age of seven, she took me to a Primary School, where I started Grade 1. She bought for me books and stationeries, she also bought for me toiletries. Afterwards she escaped to South Africa. She went to work there in a company called Watkins.

From the age of 11 until I was 13, my grandmother took good care of me whereby she even paid for me a tour to go to a lodge in Otjiwarongo. In the time of adolescence, I told her that now my body was changing, and she bought for me what a teenager needs. She spoke to me how I can behave in nowadays life. She always bought for me toiletries at all times.

In my whole entire life, I will adore my mother and my grandmother. When I will work, I will make sure I will make for them a thankful party to thank them for their great job.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

One day when we were playing cricket, one of my friends got hurt and started bleeding. That time I heard a lot about HIV. When she was bleeding, one of her friends wanted to touch her blood and I told him not to touch her blood because it might be dangerous for him. So we quickly ran to go and call the parents.

The parents came, we told them what happened, and they took the girl to the hospital. My friend came back two weeks later. When she came, she told me that she was HIV-positive and I told her not to worry, life goes on as long as she takes her ARVs. She took her ARVs seriously.

Sometimes after school, I buy for her fruits and I always advise her to take her pills and not to drink alcohol or smoke drugs. I told her to eat fruits and vegetables and to drink water and juice.

My dear Namibians – cooperate with other people. Always advise them not to tease others and those who are HIV-positive. Always hold hands or hug each other, but do not touch his/her blood.

“My mother passed away in 2006 at night”

Salomo, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

In 2000, I used to live with my mother and my aunt at the village, and sometimes I used to sleep at my grandmother's house. She is the mother of my mother and I liked spending time at her house. And then I spent the holiday at my grandfather's house in Oshikoto region and I was a naughty boy. I was beating the animals. We had a lot of animals like chicken, goats, sheep, pigs and cattle.

One day when I was going to fetch fire wood, I found a goat with a small goat, a baby, and it could not walk. I did not look for fire wood anymore, I took the small goat at home to show it to my grandfather and I took care of it.

Then one day, the phone called and my aunt was saying that my mother passed away in 2006 at night. I was sad and I did not go to school. We went to the memorial. It was on the 14th of July 2009 when we came to Windhoek with my aunt. We lived in Hakahana, that time I was nine years old and I grew up with my aunt. Until now I live in Hakahana.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

My neighbour was living with the virus in the village. The man had a wife and a child. The man used to live in Windhoek and she worked at NDF (Namibian Defense Force). When she went to the hospital, the doctor told her that she was infected. Since then, we did not like her family, people did not like to speak to them, we did not like to play with her child anymore, and then they moved to Windhoek, all of them went.

“I am helping her to wash her clothes every weekend”

Helvi, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

My mom takes care of me every time. She always buys for me food and clothes. My mom loves me too much.

When I was very sick, my mom took me every day to the doctor. I was born in Swakopmund, but when I was sick, my mom and I had to come to Windhoek. Then we did stay in Windhoek up to now.

I started Grade 1 at Auas Primary School. When I was in Grade 2 at Moses Gareib Primary School, it was the time when I was staying at Hakahana. I was learning Oshiwambo, but at kinder garden I was only learning Afrikaans. But in Grade 2, they only learned me Oshiwambo, then I did fail.

In 2007, I did come to Havana Primary School where I repeated Grade 2. Now I am in Grade 7 at Havana Primary School. I am staying at Havana location. I am not staying with my father. I am only staying with my mom.

I like going to school every day. I go with a lunch box every day or money. I am in Oshiwambo culture and I like making my homework every day.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I know Sara who is having HIV/AIDS. She is my friend at Ombili. I love her because she is having good manners to other people all around. I help her with her homework. She always drinks her medication every time. It was given to her by the hospital. I am helping her to wash her clothes every weekend. Some people, they are saying that if you are staying with someone who has HIV, you will also get it.

“Now I am grown up and I can take care of myself”

Wilhelmina, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

In 2000, my aunty was taking care of me until 2004. From 2004, my mother started taking care of me. When my mother started taking care of me, she was very glad to see me grown up, and my father was glad to see me too.

In 2005, my mother took me to a kinder garden near us. In 2006, I was in Grade 1 and my uncle started taking care of me. He was very nice to me and he liked me very much. He was having two children, and when I was about to go to Grade 2, he sent me here to Windhoek to Havana Primary School in 2007.

In 2007, my friend's mother started taking care of me when I was in Grade 2. She took care of me because my mother was working at that time. Then in 2008, my mother started to take care of me because she was only going to work sometimes. I was very glad to be taken care of by my mom again. My father was not in Windhoek, he was in Swakopmund.

In 2009, I was in Grade 4 and I went to my aunty to Goerangab. She took care of me until 2010 when I was in Grade 5. From there, my mom started to take care of me until now when I am in Grade 7. It's 2012 and now I am grown up and I can take care of myself.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In 2011, I had a friend who was HIV-positive. She was very friendly to me and I liked her very much.

One day when I was coming from school, I saw her crying. I went to her and asked her what was wrong. She told me that she was HIV-positive. At first I did not believe, but later I believed it. When she told me so, I thought I will not be her friend anymore, but our friendship still continues. I treat her still nice.

She was having a boyfriend, but her boyfriend left her. She used to cry many times, but I always tried to do my best to help her. We used to do our homework together, and we were going to play together at the park. When she was not having something to eat, I was always cooking for her and giving her to eat. I always convinced her that even though she had HIV, it is not the end of her life. What she needs to do is just to drink her pills at the right time.

We were very happy friends and we used to enjoy together. But later on, she moved to Okahandja and she stayed there. She gave me her number and I always used to call her. Sometimes I used to

go to visit her on holiday or weekend, and we used to go and enjoy together, and I told her stories about the school and her friends. I was very friendly to her.

“I just went back to my mother’s house because of my auntie’s manners”

Karisto, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

When I was three years old, my mother took me to my grandmother in 2002 because my mom had to go to a training. I grew up with my grandmother and she took good care of me. I thank my grandmother very much because she was giving me healthy food.

When my mother came from the training, we went to Windhoek and stayed in Windhoek. I started school when I was four years old. My mother took me to Sun Morning Pre-School. My teacher’s name was Miss Martha. The school was not very far from our house, and sometimes I got tired and I ran away from school. Sometimes my mother used to go and sleep at work, so I only used to stay in the house with my sister.

When I started Primary School, which was Grade 1, I started in Caprivi and stayed at my auntie’s house. My auntie was not having good manners. I started school in Caprivi because I did not get a school in Windhoek. I just went back to my mother’s house because of my auntie’s manners.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was about seven years old, my parents and I were staying with my uncle who is HIV-positive. We were staying in Windhoek with my uncle. I love my uncle, but the bad thing is that whenever my friends come to play with me, they say bad words to me because I have a positive uncle.

My uncle was also having many friends, but when they heard that my uncle is positive, they moved away from him. My uncle’s friends moved away and only some were still coming to visit him and bringing for my uncle some fruits and vegetables. And the friends that moved away used to phone and say bad words to my uncle, which made my uncle feeling so very bad and stressed.

My mother was taking care of my uncle, but my uncle used to steal out of her house. At the same time, my uncle started drinking alcohol and smoking, which made my uncle very sick. After some few months, my uncle passed away. I just want to tell all the people who are positive that they must take their tablets seriously and drink it on time. And they must not drink any alcohol or smoke.

“My mother told my grandmother to take me to the witch doctor”

Mercy, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

1998 is the year when I was born and my mother was taking care of me. When I was five years old, my mother took me to my grandfather and my grandmother so that they could take care of me.

I stayed with my grandparents at Ohangwena and our village was Ombaladila. I stayed in that village with a lot of people and, when I was six years old, my grandmother took me to a kinder garden.

Kabale Junior Primary School is where I started my school in 2005, when I went to Grade 1. In 2006, I was in Grade 2, in 2007, I was in Grade 3 and in 2008 I was in Grade 4.

When I was in Grade 4, I got sick. When I was sick, there was only that thing that found me in the class when I was writing an examination or a test, and when that thing found me, I was even sleeping for four days, just sleeping. When my granny was calling me, I could hear it, but the problem was I could not say “Yes.” That third term, I was the third person sick like that.

In 2009, I went to Enyama Combined School, still in Ohangwena. I was in Grade 5. That thing followed me there and I was not the only person who was sick. There were many learners who suffered.

My mother told my grandmother to take me to the witchdoctor. When my grandmother took me to the witchdoctor, he said that I must go and school somewhere else because that thing, it will not stop. In 2010, my mother brought me to Khomas. Now I am feeling very well and I thank God for that. I was repeating Grade 5 there. In 2011, I was schooling at Havana Primary School. Now in 2012, I am in Grade 7. But education is the great equaliser.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was schooling in the North, I was having a friend called Nangula. This girl was HIV-positive, she was always crying. She didn’t have a mother and a father.

One day she came to me to ask me for a pen because we were writing a test and she was not having a pen. The people, they did not like her, they used to call her names. This girl was the best clever one in the class, so I gave her a pen.

But one day, when I was not having a pen and I asked her for a pen, she said she has a pen, but she will not give me. Then I also started to call her names and giving names to her.

We were discriminating her and beating her when the school was out. She always cried.

In the second term, this girl got tired of these noises of ours and she went to the office to report us to the principal. When the principal called us, we went there and the principal asked us why we were doing this to the girl, she is even an orphan. One boy said, “We don’t care.” The principal beat us up and we were beaten by the principal. Discrimination is not a good thing to orphan learners or positive learners.

“We pulled the bull by its horns”

Puleni, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

I grew up in a small town called Gibeon, but I was born in Mariental. My mom was expecting to get a baby girl, but when she saw I am a boy, she refused me once, but then she thought twice and said, “Even though he is a boy, he is a gift from God.”

Since I was small, my mom was my role model. I just wanted to be like her one day. My mom and my dad argued a lot, so my mom grabbed me and ran away to my aunt’s house. But there things became even worse. My aunt’s children stigmatised me, saying I am black and ugly.

My granny would always be saying that I am the light and backbone of the family and I am going to make them proud by finishing my grades with flying colors and becoming a successful businessman to enlighten and empower my family and make the ones ashamed who were discriminating and stigmatising me and make my mom proud.

From Gibeon, my mom came to Windhoek for better job facilities and better school facilities because, by that time, my mom was not employed.

When we came to Windhoek, it was difficult for me to go to school, but then my mother got a job and started paying my school fees. And at Primary, she would not afford my general school fees, but God is good, so there were Dutch sponsors who were willing to help us.

I was schooling at Moses, but then I moved to Havana informal settlement and I was schooling at Havana P. S. I was in Grade 2, but my work was not excellent. In Grade 3, Term Two, I started to improve. I started reading newspapers to improve my English. I was in Ms Tense’s class and again, in Term Three, I was sponsored by Taiwanese sponsors, and all my grades I did well till where I am sitting now, Grade 7.

There were hard times and good times, but we never gave up. We pulled the bull by its horns.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

First I thought HIV is not existing, I thought it’s just a story to scare people. But later things changed and I started to know more about HIV.

My friend called me one day and told me that he is positive. I was shocked. I didn’t believe my ears because he was a well-muscled fat boy. Since we were small, we were very close friends and we helped each other a lot.

He said his parents died of AIDS and now he is an orphan and is sponsored. He feels lonely sometimes and different because he feels different from others. Sometimes he throws away his tablets.

One day he asked me to be his treatment supporter and I agreed to it. Sometimes my friends are teasing him and he feels bad and sometimes he wants to commit suicide.

“I used to live at my neighbour’s house”

Lucky, Grade 7

Who takes care of me?

In 2001, when I was one year old, I was raised in Windhoek at Wanaheda with my mother. When my mother was employed, I used to live at my neighbour’s house. There was a little child who lived at our neighbour with his mother.

Every month my mother bought food for the neighbour’s house. This woman was giving her child a full plate and me a half plate. When her child was beating me and I was beating her child too, she came and beat me. When my mother came home, I used to tell her, but she said I am lying. The next day, the woman was beating me again and I was having a sore, then I told my mom and my mom took me to a kinder garden.

Later in 2006, I went to Betel Primary School. In Grade 1 in 2006, my mother made a *kambashu* [a simple hut] in Havana settlement. In 2007, I went to Havana Primary School because it was nearby our house. This time I was staying with my sister who finished schooling and came to university.

Next year, my mother became sick and I and my sister, we took her to the hospital and she was transferred to the North. Then I only stayed in the house with my sister and we did not have enough money to buy food. We used to pray every day and every night. I live with my sister until now.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was seven years old, I heard people talking about HIV, and then I went to my parents and asked them, “Dad, mom, what is HIV? I just heard people talking about HIV and I used to see T-shirts where it was written: ‘Let’s fight against HIV/AIDS’.”

My mother told me that HIV is a virus that comes from unprotected blood contact and unborn babies get infected by their mother. Then I asked them, “Where does HIV come from?” They said, “Nobody knows where HIV comes from.” Then I said if I also contacted HIV, I will go to the hospital. My mom said HIV can’t be treated, but it can be managed.

One day I was walking in the street and I saw my neighbour was drunk. He fell down. I ran quickly to help him, but he was bleeding. I took my hand out of the pocket. I was about to help him, then I thought about what my mom and dad told me about HIV/AIDS, that HIV is transmitted through blood contact, then I quickly went to a nearby adult and told her and she called an ambulance and he was HIV-positive.

Social Crisis and Social Powers: A child-headed household in Havana

**Editors' Note, Havana (Khomas Region),
September 2012**

Lovisa and her two sisters live in Havana, one of the poorest areas of Katutura in Windhoek. The owner of the small house they live in is their aunt who is out for work seven days per week. The aunt is a domestic worker at a military camp. During weekends, she sells self-made clothes and baby carrier bags at the market. The children call her *meme* (mother).

The biological mother of the girls died some years ago, probably because of AIDS. When she got sick, she went back to her family in the North who cared for her until she died. Because of the school, the children stayed in Katutura.

Their father lives in the neighbourhood, but is not able to support the children. He is unemployed and addicted to alcohol.

Using the TV and the deep freezer in the house, the children started their own small business. They loan DVDs and the hut is a small cinema. During our visit, children from the neighbourhood were sitting on a bench and on the ground, watching the English comedy series *Mr Bean*, while some were doing homework together.

The girls survive with the money they earn with their small cinema and by selling ice made of water and apple flavour from the supermarket. With the money, they buy food and water (which they have to fetch from a pump using a prepaid card), they pay for electricity, school and kindergarten.

It takes Lovisa one hour to get to school in the morning and one hour to come back home. After school, she cooks *oshifima*, the pap made of maize. Sometimes she can afford to buy some vegetables from a little shop in the neighbourhood.

The aunt took in the children because alone they were not safe against housebreaking, so the children say, and against rape, our Namibian companion added on later when we left the house. The seriousness on their faces is obvious. But at the same time, the girls radiate a serenity and sovereignty that are remarkable.





Child-headed household: Lovisa and her two younger sisters live in Havana (Katutura, Windhoek). Their source of income are a TV and a deep freezer.

Chapter 2

**“Who takes care of me?
Growing up in times of AIDS”**



*Essays from Learners of
Shimbode Combined School, Epinga*

“The house is full”

Hilda, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am a 17 year old girl. I live with my grandmother. I'm hereby to give proof that the only person who is responsible for taking care of me is my grandmother. The main reason for me to be with my grandmother is that she is my father's mother. Secondly, she is near to the school where I go.

I cannot stay with my mother because she is very far and where she is, there is no school. Therefore, I just have to stay with my grandmother.

I'm the only child in our house that is not with her mother. My dad is from our house, but he is working in Walvis Bay. The problem is that my father never comes to visit us. He never helped my granny, not even in buying my basic needs or paying my SDF. I'm just here depending on my grandmother. Granny is too old and she is also having her children. They are not working, they are just depending on her also.

Some of my needs in which granny can help me are my school needs. My grandmother usually pays my SDF each year, but that is all when it comes to my school needs. She tells me straight forward that she has her children to take care of.

My mother is very far. I cannot get there for a weekend, I can just get there during long weekends and holidays. Mom usually buys all my basic needs, enough to reach the other coming holiday when I will be with her. My dad never gives me anything, not even a single soap.

Grandmother also provides me with enough food, but even though she does that, whenever I'm coming from holiday, I just have to carry food from my mother. Grandmother always clearly states that the house is full and she cannot afford to give enough food to everybody around her.

Apart from food, with my own feeling I think that granny uses to think that she normally satisfies all my needs. But as I can see and think what is happening in my life these years, she don't really care about me as my mom would if I was staying with her. I cannot talk about my dad, because he never gives anything to me, and he is to be blamed of everything that happens to me while he is there in Walvis Bay.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

AIDS is the disease that made us lose many of our relatives. Nowadays some of the children in our community are suffering because they have no parents. They became orphans due to this disease.

When I look around in our community, especially in houses were some parents left due to AIDS, I come to realise that they left their children in a bad situation. These children have nobody who take care of them. No one will support them with clothes and food. Those type of situations lead to poor listening at school when children are in classes.

One day I went to visit my aunty at Ongwediva. There I have seen a lot of orphans. Some live with their stepmother and some with their relatives. There I realised that if one of your parents passes away and you live with someone who is not your mom or dad, it's very much difficult for you to survive better. Orphans are treated badly, some are being beaten up and down every day and being chased away.

Sometimes a person may say to an orphan: “I’m not the one who sent your mother/father to death,” or “Go get food from your mother’s tombstone.” Only women normally say that to orphans.

Those orphans who live on the streets, they are always responsible to wake up early in the morning to go all over the street to look for food in rubbish bins. The government should build houses for those orphans.

Some orphans normally receive a social grant, but their caregiver will not buy anything for that orphan. They go drink alcohol and after coming home, they beat or chase away an orphan child.

“Social workers in our country must take orphans from the streets”

Monica, 15 years old

Who takes care of me?

As all parents take care of their children, my mom and my aunt are responsible for me. They take care of me either when I’m at home or at school. I am living with my aunt because my dad passed away years ago and my mother stays far from the school. They all support me with my school needs or private needs.

My mom is the one who is responsible for my school needs or materials because I get a social grant from the government and she is the one who takes it. She buys for me a school uniform, school bag and pays the School Development Fund (SDF) for me. I get any school needs from her. This is the reason why I am always happy at school because I look like other learners.

As I said, I am living in my aunt’s house. She is the one who is responsible to buy for me clothes and food. She stays in a far town and she sends money to buy food through a bank. When she comes home, she brings clothes for me and all girls’ properties. She also employs a person in the house to take care of us because there is no elder person to take care of us in the house.

I am always happy as I am staying in the house that does not have any discrimination treatment. Even though we are living as nieces, nephews and cousins, it seems as we are brothers and sisters. I think I could live like this my whole life!!

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I look at AIDS orphans, I start asking myself, “What if it was me, surviving like a bird?” Some orphans decide to kill themselves so that they will follow their parents because life is a disaster for them.

AIDS orphans are discriminated in homes because they have nowhere to go to survive better. Their inheritors shout bad words, give them little food, and they never buy clothes for them. If an orphan hears this, he/she might go to the street, and this is reducing the economy of our country. Some children were best performers at school and due to the unfair treatment in their families, they drop out of school.

As we all know, AIDS is reducing our economy. This is because death caused by AIDS is more than 50%. Our government is spending money on buying ARVs, instead of buying books or building more schools.

AIDS is increasing crime in Namibia, because when orphans live on the streets, they will start robbing or stealing for better survival. I feel pity for street kids because they don't change their clothes, never take a bath or sleep at a safe place.

I think that the government must stop giving the prisoners nice food and instead start buying orphans clothes. People or inheritors must stop discriminating orphans, and social workers in our country must take orphans from the streets to take care of them in their houses.

“I have many works to do”

Elisabeth, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

Since I was a baby, my parents, they have a responsibility to take care for me. Because I am a last born, my parents took me to my grandmother, the mother of my mother, to help her. My parents always have a responsibility to pay my school fund and some things that I need. All the things for school, if they have money, they buy for me.

My grandmother does not have a responsibility to help me with school needs or school fund. She has a responsibility to give me food and always, when I go to school, she knows that I must eat before I go to school. My grandmother does not receive any salary from the government, the money she receives is only for food.

Sometimes I am not happy because I do not have enough time to study and do my homework because I have many works to do. I am not happy because I want to take care of my parents, and the problem is that my parents do not have their own house where they are. My mother is in the house of her grandmother and my father is in the house of his parents.

If you take care of other people, it is not good because you do not get a time to study, and they always treat you in a bad way. They always beat you for the mistakes you do because your parents are not in this house with you.

My parents always help me with the school fund and clothes until now. My aunt of my father and my uncle of my mother, they help my parents with many problems that I have.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In these times of AIDS, if a person is growing up, he/she must be serious. You can see many problems that could happen to you. Like now, many children are orphans because of AIDS. Many parents are ill and there is no one who takes care of the children. Many of them are the people who are 11-49 years old. They are not the only ones who are affected by AIDS. Even infants are attacked by AIDS through breastfeeding because when the parents were told to use a condom, they said that is a wasting of their time.

It is very difficult. If people have AIDS, sometimes he/she is treated in a bad way by the parents. It is difficult, because in this nowadays, people who are growing up without parents, it causes many problems. Sometimes there is no food to eat and no place where you can sleep. That problem causes the children to go out on the streets and find their food and their place for sleeping there.

“Who will look after their children?”

Festus, 19 years old

Who takes care of me?

When I started school in 2002 at Shimbode Combined School, my grandmother, she was the one who was taking care of me on behalf of my father and my mother. When it comes to school needs, my half-brother always made sure that he bought all my school needs. My grandmother was responsible to feed me.

In 2006, I migrated to Ohakafiya to go and stay with my parents. That year I started Grade 5 at Ohakafiya Combined School. By that time, my father was responsible to pay for my School Development Fund and for my school needs. My mother was responsible to make sure that every time I am going to school I have my food.

I found out that the way my grandmother was treating me was not equal to as my parents use to treat me. My mother always tells me old stories about the past and how their culture was and to which tribe she belongs.

In 2011, when my father went to South Africa, he told me that I must go back to Epinga because there is his brother who will take care of me in whatever I need, except of buying food. So now I am again a learner at Shimbode Combined School.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

According to the experience I know about HIV and AIDS, we were having the big nation, but now it is just a little nation. This means that many of our family members died because of AIDS.

In our country today, children are no longer going to school because many of our teachers in our country suffer from AIDS. There is not much life expectancy in our country, and this problem leads to make our country poor and it will increase unemployment, lack of medical care and it will increase poverty.

When it comes to the needs of workers, workers are no longer working hard and sometimes they are always thinking of their families, like if they are going to die, who will look after their children. This is why many children in our country become more dependent on other people's children when they are at school.

“To be taken care of by a person who is not your biological parent is very difficult”

Paulina, 15 years old

Who takes care of me?

As we know, taking care is popular in our country nowadays. Those responsible for taking care of me are my parents. Unfortunately, my grandparents are the ones who take care of me. The reason is that the house of my parents is very far from the school. Though the house of my grandparents is not that much nearer to the school, the distance is shorter.

My grandparents give me food. I think this food is enough for me. About the school needs, my parents are the ones who pay for my school fund and buy me the uniform and everything related to the needs of the school. My grandparents are not really responsible for my shelter because sometimes I inform them about my problems, but nobody can overcome them.

I really appreciate to be with my grandparents, even though they are not really taking good care of me. I observed many mistakes they did to me, but I will thank them for being with me all the time until now.

I never received clothes from my grandparents until now, but I received food. This is possible because they only get the pension and it is not enough for them. They sometimes say bad things to me, but I ignore it, as I know that to be taken care of by a person who is not your biological parent is very difficult.

Sometimes I do not get enough time to study due to the work that I need to do in the house, which sometimes makes me sad and think about my parents. When I am staying with my grandparents, I am not really free because when it comes to the way that I am treated, it is different from the way they are treating their children.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Namibia became the first victim of the people who had AIDS and this disease is decreasing our economy. Some orphans have their parents dead because of this killer disease. And this makes them to be very scared and shy to other children.

Orphans, they are suffering when it comes to shelter. They receive a social grant from the government, which is not enough for them. Sometimes the situation gets worse when it comes to the social grant because the people who get this money on behalf of the child, they just get drunk, and the child will never receive any need that she/he needs. These orphans, if they are in school, they might be not concentrating in the school, and they will end up being street children.

As a result, the children will be dropped out of school, and she/he is not going to have bright future due to this kind of situation. The people who are jeopardising themselves are the teenagers, and they are the ones who have a high percentage of getting pregnant while they are in school.

AIDS is a disease which has no cure, if you get affected by it, you will live with it for the rest of your life. This disease does not come from the air, but through unprotected sex. And using a condom is not the best way you can protect yourself – the best way is to abstain.

I have noticed that our economy is decreasing because of this incurable disease. And those who are infected need care and support to provide physical care, ensure good nutrition and help with domestic chores.

AIDS has many disadvantages. You will be very shy of other people and thinking more and more, which sometimes causes high blood pressure and death.

I would like to say let's abstain. And those who are infected should start their medication and live responsibly. Those who are negative should live uninfected.

“Nowadays, houses are without parents”

Rosalia, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

As a responsibility to take care of children rests with their parents, my mother is the one who takes care of me. When I was young, both of my parents were taking care of me, but in 2000 my father passed away and then I lived with my mother until now.

In 2003, she took me to school where I was admitted, but at that school there is only Grade 1 up to Grade 7. She bought for me school uniforms, materials and paid for me School Development Fund (SDF). She also buys for me clothes, food and everything that I need.

In the year 2010, my mother sent me to another school because my next grade was not available at the school where I started. Now, I stay at my grandfather's house at Eembidi village. The reason why I am there is because there is a long distance from my mother's house to school.

When I go there, I am related to my uncle, a brother to my mother. When I am at uncle's house, they only support me with food. They don't buy me any clothes, they don't even pay for my School Development Fund, they only support me with buying food as well as school materials. Every year my mother is the one who is responsible to pay for me school fund, buy clothes and so on.

I am not happy when it comes to how we are treated at my uncle's house because I just pound [mahangu] every day, while some children are not concerned about household chores.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

As we know, AIDS is a disease that kills people in the world. Namibian people are also infected by AIDS, and this disease leads to poverty. Nowadays, houses are without parents because they are dead by the killer disease. For example, in our country Namibia, orphans are suffering because if parents pass away, no one will be responsible for these children. Some orphans will be street children because no one takes care of them.

HIV and AIDS can cause poverty in the world. AIDS causes many problems because if someone is affected, she/he will not be cured. Even those orphaned children, they are not really going to have better future because some people, they don't treat children in a good way. This disease cannot be cured. This situation leads to poverty because people are ill, therefore no one has energy to do something.

Nowadays, children are becoming the owners of the home because their parents have passed away. Like in the North, here people they don't understand about the disease called AIDS, so some people, if they are told that there is a meeting concerning AIDS, they don't even respond. It's very important to be part of the meeting.

At the end, I just want to tell people who are affected by AIDS that they must start taking medicine, and those who are not affected, they must abstain, being faithful and using condoms during sexual intercourse and remaining with one partner.

“I was left with my father”

Sion, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

When I was very young, my parents took care of me. After that, when I was growing up, my parents sent me to school so that I can have some knowledge and skills in my life. They sent me to school in 2002 on 16th of January, and that day I was so happy because this was the first day for me at school.

After a few years, my mother, who was responsible for me, passed away and I was left with my father. After some more years, my father looked for another wife, and now I'm with my father and my stepmother.

My parents, I stay with, they like me a lot. They prepare for me everything that I want to eat, they also buy for me clothes and shoes. The time when my mother passed away, I was still at primary school. That school, it has classes from Grade 1 up to Grade 7.

I am so good and brilliant when it comes to school work. In 2009, I finished Grade 7, and in 2010 my parents sent me to Shimbode Combined School, where I started Grade 8. At this school I found the principal called Mr Toivo Shilumbu.

I am still schooling at Shimbode, and I am trying all my best to achieve my goals that I want to reach. I want to thank for my parents, who take care of me in these days, after my biological mother passed away.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

AIDS is a disease that is caused by a virus, and it infects many people in different ways. So I got infected during the birth, and some got infected when they were growing up. AIDS causes the majority of deaths among the age group 25 to 45 years.

AIDS affects people in different ways:

- **Population growth:** Our population will decrease and there is an increase of mortality due to AIDS. Most of the people die because of that disease and as a result, many learners become orphans.
- **Families:** The death of a breadwinner may result in a loss of income for the family. Many parents will stay away from their work because they have to look after their sick child. They will also lose their job, and this will lead them to poverty and more children will lose their parents and become orphans.

- Education: Some classes are without teachers for a long period of time because teachers who have AIDS are too sick to come to school. Even some learners will be absent from school. Growing up in times of AIDS will lead some of the learners to become orphans and stay in the houses without their parents or to be on the streets and to become prostitutes.
- Health: A lot of money is lost because a large amount is spent on medicine and medical care.

“They always provide me with food”

Sarah, 22 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am staying with my parents. It is good to stay with my parents because there is no discrimination or neglect. They always provide me with food. They treat me fairly. We are many in the house, but they take all responsibility to make sure that they produce enough food for us in the house. I love my parents because they do not use to discriminate anyone. They take good care for us.

They like to tell me old stories, like about the nomadic way of life –the San lifestyle. I love my parents because they always cover all my needs at home and at school. They always tell me to behave in a good way and to respect adults in the society. They also give me some extra money to buy what I want. Every day when I go to school, they provide me with food. They advise me not to use alcohol, and they told me about the disadvantage of using alcohol. My parents also do not use alcohol and drugs, thus they set a good example for me.

When I was growing up, my parents sent me to my grandfather. My grandfather was very aggressive. He treated me badly. That made me to leave the place and go back to my parents. It is not good to stay with a person who is not your parent because he/she can treat you badly.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In times of AIDS, many children become street children when their parents die because of AIDS. Children become orphans. AIDS also causes discrimination in the families and separation. Many people will work without good salaries. Marriages are also breaking down because of AIDS.

AIDS makes teachers not to be at their workplace in most cases. This is forcing the government to hire teachers from other countries and, at the same time, to pay the sick teachers.

A lot of money is lost as a large amount is spent for medicine and medical care. AIDS can also cause a lot of absence of learners because they are taking care for their parents at home or at the hospital.

AIDS causes a high death rate in our country, and the population will decrease as there is an increase of mortality due to AIDS. The majority of deaths are among the age group from 25 to 49 years, and this makes the government spend a lot of money on pension. The government also provides assistance with food, school uniforms and blankets for the orphans.

AIDS causes also a high rate of unemployment in the country and also a high number of illiterates.

“They are always searching for food in the dustbins and sleep in the bush”

Daniel, 23 years old

Who takes care of me?

Since I was born, my mother has taken care of me. I grew up together with her in the same house. I started school in 1995. My mother bought for me a school uniform and all the school needs, like a bag to carry books, pencils and some of the writing books.

Apart from school activities, my sister is always helping me to do my homework, and she is always checking if I have any homework to do. She is always waking me up so that I cannot be late at school.

In 2009, my mother died and I went with my father to his house. Since that time, he is the one who is looking after me. He is the one who pays my school fund and buys my school needs. My stepmother is the one who is cooking for me all the time. When I come home, there is no need for me to cook because the food is already prepared.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Nowadays, life is too difficult compared with the past. If we are talking the truth, some of our family members died because of AIDS, and some of the houses are closed because of AIDS. In some houses, children are the head of the house because their parents passed away because of AIDS.

I'm very much disappointed when I am looking at my brothers and sisters who are affected by AIDS. If you are listening to the radio, people are dying every day, and they were the leaders of tomorrow.

Many people are affected, but you cannot see them with your naked eyes. Some children, they left their house and went on the streets because there is no one to take care of them. They are always searching for food in the dustbins and sleep in the bush. Some children become robbers because there is no one who could control them. Now they steal other people's things because of hunger. And some children, they have been dropped out of school because there is no one who pays their school fund.

I strongly motivate the Namibian people to protect themselves whenever they want sex and use condoms.

“I take proper care of myself and I am not doing sex”

Pius, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

My mother is taking care of me simply because, since I was born, I'm with her. My father told me that if I would be with my mother, she would take proper care of me.

I am with my mother who is taking care of me and supporting all my needs. The time when I was born, my mother left her mother's house. But during the year 2000, my grandmother passed away and therefore all the goods and the house were given to my mother. During the funeral, my father told me that I have to remain with my mother to look after the animals in the house.

In 2003, I started schooling at Shimbode Combined School. My mother pays the School Development Fund for me and she gives me food to eat at school in my bag and after school, when I'm coming home. She takes good care of me and supports me with all my needs.

When I was young, she washed my school uniform and bathed me. I give respect to her for that. When she sends me to do something, I would run and do what she told me to do. She always tells me when I am giving something to an elderly person that I must put my head down and up again quickly as a way of saying “yes” or “hello” to somebody.

She told me not to steal someone's property, otherwise she would beat me. She told me I can do things all the boys can do as long as it is not harmful or destroying. And once she told me many stories about the past how it has been long time ago. She always tells me to study hard so that I will have a better life.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Growing up in the time when people are suffering from AIDS/HIV, I take proper care of myself and I am not doing sex. If one is an HIV-positive person, developing full-blown AIDS, antiretroviral treatment can help to improve the quality of life and prolong it.

HIV can be transmitted during unprotected sex with an HIV-positive person and, for example, when you are sharing syringe needles or as the result of an accident.

HIV/AIDS is a problem because it leads children to become orphans. If someone is infected by AIDS he/she will lose more because, if he/she is working, sometimes he/she has to leave work to take medication. When a person starts to get sick, he may leave work. A lot of money will be spent for the support of people who are living with AIDS, for their access to things like healthy food, safe drinking water, nursing and medication.

Some school children do not have money to pay the school fund. Children become orphans and live in a house alone, without parents giving them care. Children are dropping out of school and some have no food to eat. Some children drop out of school to take care for their parents who are infected with AIDS.

If there are some teachers infected with AIDS, they will be absent from work for treatment. If a school learner's parents are suffering from AIDS, he/she can have stress and this can lead a learner to get out of school.

It will be a good thing if you get educated because you cannot survive without knowing how to read because no one would tell you how to stay away from getting AIDS.

“I am living in a good house that has no discrimination”

Otilie, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

My mother and my aunt are responsible to take care of me. They support me with my needs. I am staying with my aunt because my mother's house is far from the school and my father passed away a long time ago. The two of them support me with the following things:

- School needs: My mother is the one who is responsible for this because I receive a social grant from our government to support me during the time of learning. I am always happy at school because I look like the other learners in my school uniform and I come with lunch to school. My mother pays the SDF, buys the school bag and buys the school uniform for me.
- Clothes and food: My aunt is the one who is responsible for this. She has a job and I am living in her house. She sends food to us and the money that is needed to buy clothes. She also buys for me all the things that a girl needs.

I am living in a good house. There is no discrimination or any bad treatment. I live with my cousins and my aunt allows me to do anything.

Growing up in the time if AIDS: What is my experience?

AIDS is a disease that we lost many of our relatives to. In Namibia many people died of AIDS and this disease is very dangerous for everyone.

Some of the children in our community, they don't have their parents, they became orphans due to AIDS. Many children, they do not go to school because there is no money for the school fund. Their parents are dead because of AIDS and now they don't have anyone to help them.

Some children who are orphans, they don't have any support, they don't have food to eat and clothes, and they don't go to school because of money. Those orphans, their parents, they don't want to support them. Some orphans, they don't even want to use the social grant from the government. But their parents don't want to help the child, and when they receive that money, they are using it to drink alcohol. When they come home, they start to beat the child because they are drunken. The child starts to suffer and loses its school because they don't have a school uniform and they don't have food to eat at school.

“Staying with my aunt is just like I am a slave”

Tresia, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am staying with my aunt since I was given to her when I was still a young child by my mother. I cannot stay with my parents because they are in our neighbouring country Angola.

When it comes to my school needs, I get help from my aunt, but she does not satisfy them. Both my aunt and her husband are getting a pension. Sometimes I don't pay the School Development Fund on time because they don't pay for me. When I sometimes told them to pay the SDF, they say to me that they also have their own children who attend school like me and that they don't have money for all of us.

In most cases, I get help from my mother, though she is far in Angola. I go there on holidays and get money to pay my school fund. My mother gives me assistance, even though she does not work or get any income. She gives me enough so that I can buy my clothes as well as my soaps.

Staying with my aunt is just like I am a slave. Sometimes I don't eat and, in most cases, they accuse me of everything what is done in the house. They say I am the one who did it, though I was not found in the house at that time. They always take my things, especially money, which I use to help myself. When I ask them, they nearly chase me out of their house. I do everything, pounding [*mahangu*], collecting fire wood, fetching water and cooking for them, but they don't help me with anything.

I am not happy to stay with them, it is only because I don't know where to stay as long as I'm schooling.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Namibia became a victim of AIDS because most people died, and many are still in the hospital. Many people do not want to hear what they were told by law. In most cases, AIDS came from sex, using the same needle and touching the blood of someone.

AIDS passes from one person to another through unprotected sex. When two partners are doing sex without using a condom and one of them is affected, the disease passes from the affected person to the uninfected one. That is what most people do. So in Namibia, most people are suffering of AIDS, and now we don't have neighbours in our villages because many people have passed away.

My grandparents also died of AIDS when my mother was 25 years old. They died when the colonialism of Namibia had not yet started. AIDS came to Namibia when I was not yet born. AIDS started exactly after the war of Namibia. Most people do not want to go for AIDS testing and that brings AIDS in everyone's body.

When my grandparents died, there was no HIV and AIDS test, and most of the people were not yet affected. By the time of now, most people are affected, and Namibia now is surrounded by AIDS.

We lost our friends and many children are orphans because their parents have died of AIDS. So our country does not develop because many people are ill, and that brings poverty into our country. Most orphans still think of their parents, and that also brings poverty in their life.

AIDS is finishing up our Namibians, and the government is also helping with sick leaves. AIDS is a difficult disease because there is no cure. It brings poverty into our country.

“I must also bring food from my father’s house”

Ashipala, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

My grandmother is the one who is taking care of me. She started taking care of me when I was four years old, when she took me from my father’s and my mother’s house, and this was done with their agreement.

In 2001, we went to Oshikoto region with my grandmother and she left me there with my uncle. I started Grade 1 there and stayed up to Grade 9. In 2011, my grandmother told me to come to start Grade 9 at Shimbode Combined School since that time she is the one who is taking care of me.

My grandmother is helping me in different ways. When it comes to my school needs, she is the one who pays my school fees and buys my school uniform. When it comes to the food, she is the one who buys food, but sometimes she uses to tell me that I must also bring food from my father’s house because sometimes we do not produce enough food for the family due to the impact of rain. Sometimes my mother uses to buy for me clothes and other needs.

My grandmother gives me enough care and love. When I am with my grandmother, I am always happy. She even looks after me as my mother because she gives me what I ask her.

I really love my grandmother because she uses to advise me and encourage me not to do mistakes. And she uses to tell me about disadvantages and advantages of life. She always tells me to stay in order to complete my Grade 12. During examination times, my grandmother uses to give me enough food and enough care in order to avoid me from stress.

Growing up in time of AIDS: What is my experience?

Namibia became a victim of HIV and AIDS and is severely affected. Our country is suffering loss when it comes to population and family. Children become orphans and then they become street kids.

As we know, HIV starts to affect and infect children during their childhood through the illness and death of their parents, teachers and their friends. Sometimes parents spend much of their time away from work to take care of someone in the family who is sick because of HIV and AIDS-related diseases. This is seriously resulting in a loss of jobs or leads to poverty.

Sometimes, when both parents have died, children often become street kids, and no one will guide them or give them advice. People who are infected with HIV and AIDS suffer from discrimination.

The impact of HIV and AIDS on education, especially the teachers, is that sometimes teachers lose their experience because of this disease. In some cases, classes are left without teachers for too long time because a teacher is too ill and in the hospital. This results in a drop out of learners from school because there is no teacher.

In some cases, parents take out their children from school due to the illness of someone in the family, and this leads to poverty. This experience may affect and spoil the learners' future.

The impact of HIV and AIDS is too much for our economy. Our government uses money for buying medical care, medicine and contraceptives people use to protect themselves from getting diseases. The government is supposed to build more schools, more hospitals/clinics and to buy food for the people who cannot help themselves, especially lames and old people.

What we need to do in order to prevent the spreading of HIV and AIDS is that the government should provide more advice to all people, especially to the young ones. Parents need to give more advice to their children, and people need counselling to go for a test and to know their status and to take responsibility if they are infected.

“I am with my biological parents who take care of me nicely”

Ndangi, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am with my biological parents who take care of me nicely and assist me with all my basic needs, like to buy for me food and clothes. My parents take care of me nicely, and I like the way my parents take care of me.

My parents assist me to buy for me school uniform and to pay my school funds without any help of the government. My parents take care of me, and I feel happy and proud of their help. My parents told me not to do wrong things like stealing and insulting people. They also told me to respect everybody younger or older than me. My parents give me money to buy whatever I want to buy.

I like the way my parents take care of me, and I want them to continue to take care of me like that. I am going to assist my parents when they get old and I don't let them live in poverty. I want to thank my parents because they take care of me nicely.

I want to complete my study very well and pass it at the end of the year so that I can feel happy. My parents told me to behave like a learner. I follow what my parents told me to do and I put it into practice. My parents take care of me very well and give me good things to show me that they love me too much. I also do good things to make my parents feel happy.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

As I live in the time of HIV, I realise that most of the people lost their life because of this disease. Some did not want to go to school where they could get more information, and some did not really care for themselves.

Nowadays, children are orphans because of this disease, and people still continue to have unprotected sex. The impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic will be felt severely in the working population, where a large number of people are infected.

The HIV-infected population is in the age group of 20 to 49 years old because they are the ones who have been victims of having many sexual partners, and they use to do unprotected sex.

HIV and AIDS decrease the numbers of the population. People need to know and to understand exactly how to avoid becoming infected. HIV spreads from an HIV-positive person to an HIV-negative person in the following ways: It spreads through sharing a syringe needle, through sexual intercourse and anal sex. A person who is infected with HIV will not necessarily know it because he/she may look and feel healthy.

Many children became orphans because of this disease. Some children who are orphans are not in a good situation. They are in the streets and nobody supports them.

HIV and AIDS also affect the population growth. Many parents have lost their money to take care of people who are infected and to buy food and medication.

“My father stopped loving me”

Rauna, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

I live with my brother and he is the one who takes care of me. This happened because my parents are separated, and my father stopped loving me and my sibling. Therefore my brother decided to take care of me.

I live with my brother, even though he is married and has children. But still he loves me as I am his sister and he cares for me. My brother is providing food in the house, sometimes my brother buys food, even though we depend more on the crops that we grow in the field.

My brother always buys my school needs, which include uniform, calculator and pens. Everything I need, he can buy it for me. He is the one who pays my school fees. Everything concerning about school is in my brother's hand.

When I was young, my mother bought me some clothes and took me to my brother's house. My brother bought me lots of clothes and shoes and from there I realised that I am getting enough care.

At the end of each month, my brother has to buy for me clothes and shoes. He always promises me that the more I perform good in school, the more he will buy for me nice gifts. Until now he is the one who takes care of me, and he likes to advise me to study hard so that I will become somebody in the future. My brother wants me to take care of him when he gets old. I also want to take care of him because he is the one who takes care of me now, when I am still a kid.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I experience that many children are orphans and they live in the streets because there is no place for them to call their home. Our population has decreased as there is an increase of the mortality rate due to AIDS. The majority of deaths in our country are among the age group of 25 to 45

years. There is already poverty in our country because people between the age of 35 and 45 years are the people that can be able to do the job.

Most of our families are affected by AIDS. In most of the families, sick people cannot go to work, therefore now the families' daily bread is lost. And children have to go out of school to take care for elderly relatives who are suffering of this killer disease.

The government has to spend more money to support orphans since people don't want to turn their mind. The government needs to supply a lot of food to feed orphans who live in the streets. Our population is now decreasing, therefore, if this disease still increases, the government will have to build more clinics and hospitals and train more doctors and nurses. Especially for health, much money is lost as large amount is spent on medication and medical care to prolong the life of people who are infected.

When it comes to education, learners suffer a lot because of this killer disease. Some classes are without teachers for a long period of time because teachers who have AIDS are too sick to come to school, they are not able to do the work.

I am really disappointed about this killer disease that kills a lot of people in our country. Still people don't want to turn their mind to stop practising sexual activity, therefore the number of people who are infected is still increasing.

I feel pity for orphans who live in the streets because they suffer a lot. I'm sad because some are orphans, and they live in the houses alone because their both parents already passed away.

Solution to this is for people in our country to understand the danger of this killer disease and stop practising unsafe sex to protect the human species. It is up to us, people, to be aware of this killer disease!!!

“There are plans to increase the number of children who receive support”

Loide, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

When it comes to the one who takes care of me, it is my mother. My mother is the one who takes care of me when it comes to my needs. My mother was married to my father and my father died in 2000. When my father died, I was not happy because there was no way my mother could pay my school fees.

When my father died, my mother went to the Ministry of Home Affairs office and looked for help, for a death certificate. Luckily she got a death certificate and she registered our names at the Home Affairs office to get money from the government. Up to now, that money helps me to pay the school fund.

When I started my school, I started in the school that is called O.P.S. There I started at Grade 1 and stayed to the end of Grade 7. My mother takes care of me and when I passed Grade 7, I made an application at S.C.S. [Shimbode Combined School]. Now I am schooling at that school, and it is so far from our house to school.

When it comes to my needs, my mother also gives me everything that I want. When it comes to food, at that home where I am staying, my mother, who was married by my uncle who is having a wife with bad behaviour, suffers because every week we use to pound *mahangu* [pearl millet], but his other wife's children don't do anything. She always talks nonsense that mom does not do anything, not even buying shoes from china. But for her children, she buys whatever they want, they just tell their mother, "I don't have shoes," then she buys for her baby.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

An AIDS patient can be treated, but it is only a matter of time before he or she will die of one of the diseases from AIDS. It can be just a few months or two or three years for an AIDS patient to die. An AIDS patient will suffer one disease after another, and spend a lot of time in the hospitals. Their life is sad and stressful.

Many AIDS patients have families and friends that are afraid to be near to them. They cannot work, and they are lonely and ill by themselves.

Namibia was victimised by HIV and AIDS. One of the results of AIDS is that there are a lot of orphaned children. These children are left to the care of relatives or have to look after themselves. Many AIDS orphans live in poverty and cannot go to school.

The Namibian government has to protect and care for children orphaned by HIV and AIDS. Many of these children now go to school, and get advice and support from the government. There are plans to increase the number of children who receive support.

“Nowadays, they are all ill”

Claudia, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am a girl of 17 years, currently doing Grade 9. The person who takes care of me is my grandmother. The purpose of being in her home is because she is the one who has born my father. She is the one who is responsible for me when it comes to my needs.

When it comes to my school needs, I receive some money from the government. That small money that I receive from the government, I use it for my school fees, pay the School Development Fund (SDF), buy my school uniform, pens and other different things that are needed for the school stationeries.

When it comes to food, my grandmother is the one who is able to give me the food because if she does not give me food, there is no other way I can get food. She is the one who takes care of me. There is no way to survive if there is no food.

When it comes to my other needs, it is my grandmother and sometimes it is my uncle who pays them. But the one who plays many roles when it comes to my needs is my grandmother, even though my grandmother is not able to support me with all my needs.

At the end, I decided to be with my grandmother because she is the one who takes care of me since I was five years old until now when I am 17 years old.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was 11 years old, people told me that Namibia became the victim of HIV and AIDS in the nowadays. Some parents died because of that incurable disease, and some children became orphans. Some even became street kids because there is nowhere they can go because their parents already died because of HIV and AIDS.

When I look around in our society, many people who become victims of HIV and AIDS are the teenagers. In the past years, only a few people became victims of AIDS. Nowadays, they are all ill. Teenagers become victims of HIV and AIDS because they go to the sex company to sell their body to get some money to survive. And what they are going to receive from that case of selling their body to the sex company is just the disease, and that disease is an incurable one.

If a person, he or she, knows that she cannot be able to stay away from sex, he or she must go to the clinic or hospital near you to take some contraceptives. Contraceptives are important because they avoid that killer disease. Examples of contraceptives are condoms, injections and diaphragm. But the best way is to abstain from sex or to stay with one partner, or to use condoms to keep your life safe.

Girls must follow their parents when they are telling them to be aware of boyfriends because they can waste their time, and they can get that incurable disease and get infected by that killer disease and they can die without enjoying their whole life.

“I’m a vulnerable child”

Leonard, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

The parents usually take care of their children. If one is not staying with his/her parents, then maybe with family members. But lucky enough, I am with both of my parents. My parents use to take care of me, especially when it comes to food. We work in our field to get enough food for the whole year. We never starve during the dry season.

Both my parents never worked or have been employed anywhere. So they just work in our field on subsistence farming to get enough food to feed us. Only my dad gets a pension from the government, my mother doesn't have income sources.

But when it comes to my school needs, the government pays the SDF for me as I'm a vulnerable child. I use to receive the social grant from the government each month. The amount of money that I receive each month is 200 Namibian dollars. I also use this money for my basic needs, especially for buying my clothes and my washing soap. But sometimes I use this money to buy food, so that when I am going to school I carry my food. Sometimes I won't carry it because I am afraid of carrying food. I am an elder learner now and sometimes the long distance that I use to travel to school is too much for me to carry it.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV/AIDS is a big problem for this world of today. This disease is bringing poverty in our country. HIV is a problem because most of the children have become orphans because their parents have died because of this disease.

Even our population is not growing well. Our country has a high death rate, and the government is still struggling to get ARVs for the HIV-infected people to get a treatment for them to live longer on earth.

But luckily enough to OVC in our compound, the government usually provides food to feed OVC and street kids who are suffering from hunger. And orphans and vulnerable children use to get money usually each month for their SDF and daily needs.

Our country cannot develop easily because more money needs to be spent on building schools and clinics, and again more money needs to be spent on buying ARVs for HIV-infected people and food for street kids.

“My mother is a hard-working woman”

Sarafina, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

As I am one of the orphans and vulnerable children, I have somebody who takes care of me. Since 2004, when my father passed away, I was just left with my mother to take care of me. She is the one who takes care of me and supports me when it comes to different needs. She takes care of me nicely, and I am happy and proud of her responsible caring until I complete my studying or until it comes at the level of helping myself.

Since the death of my father, my mother decided to build her own house where me and my siblings live. She gives me enough food, clothes, and she gives me different things that I need. My mother treats me well, as she does to others in our house.

My mother is a hardworking woman. She sells some of our produce. She works at the market to earn more money and to buy for me clothes and equipment for my school. My mother has always been responsible to pay my School Development Fund. She has been always responsible to buy for me school uniform. She is also the one who is helping me to buy a washing powder. She is always telling me to wash my school uniform on Sunday and Wednesday.

My mother is a good adviser when it comes to advising me how to respect elders and teachers at school. I am happy with all the needs that my mother is helping me. I would like to thank my mother and wish her more power to continue to take care of me, and I want to thank my God to give my mother power and a long life. I am happy to be with my mother until my last day comes.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I was born in times of AIDS, where many people in our country are suffering from that killer disease. I experience many problems in Namibia. I think the Namibian nation needs food and money to support themselves.

In this time of AIDS, people are infected years and years. People don't want to learn how to protect themselves from AIDS. Some people are saying, “AIDS comes to kill people, but not trees.” They are saying AIDS is in the world until we die.

Many people are killing themselves because they are infected with that killer disease. I observe many problems in our country that need to be solved, and those problems sometimes lead to the death of the nation. Although more than 70% of the people in Namibia are educated, people don't want to obey and listen to what they have been told. I don't know why.

The whole country is now affected with AIDS, while the number of infected people is still going higher. Children in schools are falling pregnant. And the more people are falling pregnant, the more the number of people who have AIDS is going high.

The government of Namibia knows that AIDS is an incurable disease. The government of Namibia is trying to help the Namibian nation, but there is nothing they can do if the people don't listen. Because of this, the Namibian nation needs to try its best to fight with that disease. People in our country need to learn more information about AIDS and how to protect themselves from it. Let's try all our best.

“Some of them die in the street, and some of them are killing themselves”

Petrus, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

My parents were responsible to take care of me when I was very young until now. They feed me and give me clothes and shoes to wear. They treat me in a good way. They also give me food which helps me to grow.

When I grew up, they told me to go and visit my grandparents. When I went there, I found that people were going to school, and I also decided that I want to go to school, so when I attended the school, I did not go back home again.

From then, my grandparents were responsible to take care of me. They buy my school uniform and some books. When I was young, they were responsible to wash me, to wash my clothes and to make sure that they cook for me before I go to school. They are also responsible to pay my School Development Fund each year and buy my school books. They buy calculators, pens and rulers for me.

They told me how to greet elders and told me to stay with my friends, but not bad friends because they will show me bad things and make me behave badly. They told me to eat healthy food and to wash my body to avoid sickness. They also told me to take part in sport because it will keep my body fit and protect me against diseases. They also told me to study hard to become somebody in the future and to have a better life.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

AIDS affects many people in our country. Some were infected during birth and some were affected when they were adults. Growing up with AIDS, you will suffer a lot and, as a result, you will get poor. The disease causes poverty in the country and a lack of education. If you are infected by this disease, you will lose school because you are afraid of other learners.

Growing up in times of AIDS, you will have a difficult future because you are suffering from the disease. Because you are not educated, you will not decide on your own what to do.

People who are infected with AIDS, they are in bad situation – some are only staying in their house alone because their parents have passed away and no one will take care of them.

Some children do not have a place to live. They do not have food to eat and they do not have clothes and this leads to poverty. The children with AIDS are living in the streets because they do not have a place to stay or live. Some of them die in the streets, and some of them are killing themselves because they have AIDS.

Growing up with AIDS will increase poverty in the country because the government spends more money on helping the people who are affected by this disease. People who are affected by AIDS lose education because they are suffering from AIDS.

“They will not have a bright future”

Shangelao, 15 years old

Who takes care of me?

I live with my biological parents in a village called Eembidi. My parents take care of me and I am enjoying living with them. They are responsible for all my needs. They make sure that there is enough food so that we cannot starve. Our staple food is *omahangu* pap [millet pap], and we depend on farming to get food. It is at substantial level.

My mother runs a Cuca shop and she tries by all means to earn money to buy food. She is responsible for doing the housework. I help her with some of the housework at the weekend and after school.

My father, who is a builder, is responsible for paying my school fees and to buy stationeries that I need at school. He works hard to earn money to pay for our basic needs.

I am enjoying living with my parents. They are kind and always eager to help me. They don't abuse me and, whenever I did something wrong, they take disciplining measures that are fair and appropriate and logically related to my misbehaviour. They do not use corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure, and I am happy to live with them because I know they respect and trust me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV/AIDS affects people in various ways – physically, emotionally and financially. It also affects the education of children, especially of the orphans.

When parents get infected by the virus and become sick, children are forced to take on more responsibilities to look for themselves and for the sick parents. Due to a lot of work which has to be done, these children are forced to drop out of school, and many children end up in the streets. Their education, housing and nutrition will suffer as well as their general quality of life.

When parents/guardians die of AIDS, orphans are left behind. These children are sometimes taken in by extended family members and place a financial stain on the families. If the families are uninformed, they will think these children are infected by AIDS and they will start to discriminate, reject and tease the orphans.

Many houses become child-headed, and it is difficult to meet the children's basic needs as less money is available for food, clothes and school fees. These children are forced into crime and prostitution to earn money, as some of the orphans don't receive the grant from the government and they have nowhere else to get money. These children will lose concentration on school work, which leads to failure, and so they will not be able to find good jobs and they will not have a bright future.

“They are waiting for someone to hold them when they are waking up”

Laina, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am with my grandmother who has born my mother and she really cares for me and loves me too much. She did never scold me since I am with her. She pays my School Development Fund early and buys my school uniform without any help from other people in the community. She always tells me not to do wrong things, like stealing or insulting other people. She told me that I should always respect each and everybody younger or older than me.

The money that my grandmother uses to buy for me school uniform and to pay my school fees is my assistance from the government as I am an orphan. My grandmother uses it in a correct way, just as the government expects the money to be used.

After my grandmother provides me with all my needs, she gives me some money also to buy my wants and for her to make me happy and to show that she really cares and loves me too. If the assistance that I receive from the government is not enough to buy all my needs, my grandmother also adds some money so that I can afford to succeed.

My grandmother goes to blast furnace to produce clay pots, and she also produces grass baskets. She sells them so that she can be able to rescue me from hunger and herself. She also gets assistance by the government each month, which she uses to assist me to buy all my basic needs and to help to buy the needs for the house.

I am very happy about the way my grandmother treats me, and I think she will still continue to treat me like that forever. When I complete my study, I will not let grandmother be in poverty. I will help her correctly when she gets old. As our old ancestors used to say, “You must assist your parents when you are grown up because they were the ones who assisted you when you were still young.” And my grandmother uses to tell me that you will keep tripping along the way and fall, but get up and keep going. I will never forget these words.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I found out that the great majority of the population in Namibia is affected by HIV and AIDS-related diseases. Many people are dying because of HIV and AIDS, and the population and the life expectancy of people are decreasing too much. Some productive people die of AIDS, especially skilled ones, which is leading to replacements by less skilled workers and more training costs. All this is leading to reduced productivity.

The impact of HIV and AIDS epidemic will be felt severely in the working population since a large proportion of HIV-infected population is in the age group of 20 to 49 years old. They are the ones who had been victims of having many sexual partners, and they use unprotected sex.

As I grew up in times of HIV and AIDS, I see that a lot of people died because of this epidemic. There were many people who did not get enough information to protect themselves against this terrible virus, or they did not really care about it, even though they heard that HIV and AIDS is a disease with no cure.

Many of the children become orphans because of HIV and AIDS, and some become vulnerable because their parents are infected by HIV and AIDS. They are not able to take care for them and support their basic needs. Most of the children are also infected with HIV and AIDS transmitted from their parents, and nobody takes care for them. Some become very ill and they are not able to work. A person is just in bed, waiting for someone to provide him/her with food and to hold them when they are waking up.

The solution to the problem is that we, people, we must not put ourselves in danger, but we must try to protect ourselves so that our lives are not just flash in the pan. We must not be part of the problem, but become part of the solution.

“I always feel love when I look at her”

Hosyana, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

From the year 2000 up to now, I'm with my grandmother. I'm not staying with my biological parents because they earn no income, and they are not able to cover all my needs.

When I was younger, about five years old, my grandmother sent me to school to have a brighter future. I was always adhering the rules and the school was going well until now.

My grandmother uses to cover all my needs by offering me what I desire, especially when it comes to education. She does this very soon to make me very amazed, and I always feel love when I look at her because she has good manners with people.

From my younger age until now, I feel excited with the situation where I am. But now I use to think deeply about death because of the situation that I will be facing when my grandmother is going to die, in which situation I will be perhaps soon.

Every time I use to think about my grandmother because of the adoration that I have for her. She always advises me to “work like a slave, if I want to live like a king” while she is still alive. Currently everything is going well.

About the food, my grandmother is the one who has the responsibilities to offer food for me. We are many in the house, but she manages to satisfy all the household needs. The money that she uses to cover all this is the pension she receives each and every month, but it is only 500 Namibian dollars. Hence, sometimes now her relatives use to support her in terms of food and children clothes. They really love me and respect me because of the respect and discipline that I have.

I use to make her very astonished every time. If it happens that she will die, we will suffer like nobody on this earth. Until now, nobody in our house acquires income from the government, except our grandmother.

We are all still studying to be VIPs in the future. We have very few people in our families who earn income from the government.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

AIDS is the disease that destroys the body's immune system, and it kills many people in the world. This disease, until now, doesn't have a cure, but there are ARVs that prolong the life of infected people.

AIDS causes many adversities due to decline of the population in the world. I am aware that HIV/AIDS has killed many of millions people in the world. This disease cannot identify, even a poor or a rich person can be infected. This disease is now destroying our nation. It can be spread through blood contact by a person with HIV/AIDS and through having unprotected sex with an infected person. This can be prevented by abstaining. Be faithful to your partner to avoid the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Many people in their families, they have lost their breadwinner due to AIDS. The pandemic has had a dramatic effect on the economic growth. Most people living with HIV/AIDS are in the prime of their working life. Productivity is likely to decline due to illness and absenteeism.

HIV/AIDS has a huge impact on the health care sector, such as hospital and clinics. AIDS patients have become essential. AIDS also claims the lives of leaders on whom communities depend. It results in more orphans and vulnerable children. Family members of the infected persons may not be well informed about HIV and AIDS and may have false fears, e.g. that they may contact the virus by their closeness to the infected person. This causes fear and confusion, and it often results in the isolation of the infected person. This causes the family not to meet their basic needs as less money is available for food, clothes, utilities and school fees. Assets may be in the crisis in most cases, and children sometimes have to drop out of school to work and to provide for their families. These children are often forced into crime or prostitution.

When parents die of AIDS, orphans are left behind. Stigmatisation and discrimination may result and the orphan may be teased and rejected. They have to suffer also the practical and psychological impact of the loss of care, love, food, education and clothes. Children are chased to move to streets and to feed themselves from dustbins. In these cases, many have lost their lives. Maybe the government should try to take all the street children and put them in their care.

“Now I pretend that she is my mother”

Maria, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

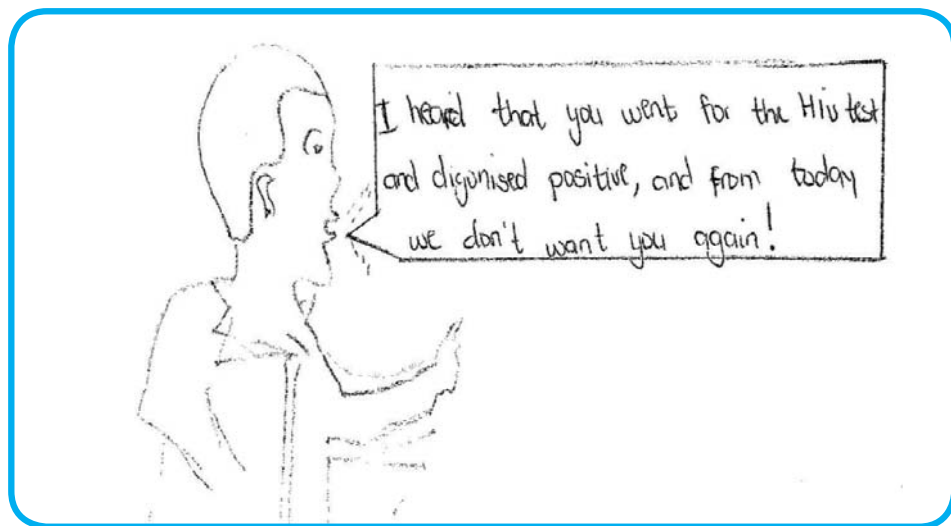
I am staying with my sister who is married. I was given to my sister when I was still a young child by my parents. My parents did this because my sister's house is near to the school so that I can attend school. I attended school and now I wrote my Grade 10 examinations at Shimbode Combined School. Because of this, I cannot stay with my parents.

Both my sister and her husband are responsible to assist me with my needs. My sister gives me food, clothes and other needs that she can afford, like soaps and shoes. She doesn't work, but she

always tries her best to satisfy my daily needs. My sister cares for me a lot, and now I pretend that she is my mother. Though she has also her own three children, she treats us equally.

My sister's husband works and he is responsible for my school needs. I cannot tell of one year I went to school without being paid the SDF. Even though we are two in the house going to school, we both pay SDF on the first day we go to school from December holidays.

I feel good to stay with my sister because she gives me plenty of time to study during the examinations. She frees me from work and lets me study. What if it was you?



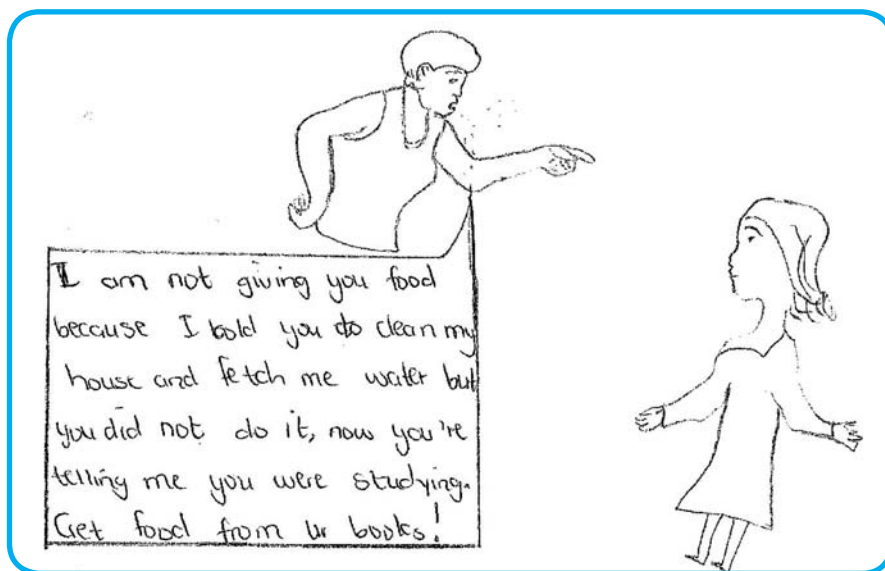
Growing up in times of AIDS: What is your experience?

I hardly believe the way people live and stay with the AIDS disease. In most parts of the world, people are not even aware what the disease is impacting on economies and people in the developing countries.

What I experienced most is that people living with HIV patients do not care for them. Patients are discriminated against and, in most cases, they are "thrown out" because their relatives assumed that they are not needed.

At work, people are chased away because employers think that they can spread the virus to everyone at the workplace. People at work are dismissed and fired because they are HIV-positive.

To my experience, almost half of the total children in the country are orphans because their parents died of AIDS. The most victims of discrimination are found in homes. Due to their rights which are let down by their caregivers, sometimes children are not given food. In most cases, they are used as farm workers and do everything in the house.



Most orphans attend schools with no goal of passing since they know no one will pay for their school fund. Though orphans get assistance from the government, caregivers, in most cases, use that money for their own benefits.

“AIDS is spreading too much”

Grace, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

Since I was born, my grandparents were the ones who took care of me, before my father got married. My grandparents love me because of my behaviour. I am a clever girl.

My grandparents took care of me nicely since I started school in 2003. My grandparents were having a responsibility to give me food early in the morning, before I went to school. My grandparents were also having responsibility to support me with all my needs, like school needs. My grandparents have never been working in life, only using the money they earn from the government. My grandparents took care of me until I was 13 years old.

In 2009, my father married my stepmother. I live in my father's house now, hence they are my parents. My stepmother and my father, both of them are having a responsibility to buy my needs. My father, who takes care of me, has a job. He earns 1 000 Namibian dollars per month. My stepmother does not have any job, she does not have any income.

My father and my stepmother are always responsible to give me food and to buy my needs for school. My father does not have any problems with me, he loves me too much.

In father's house, sometimes I'm doing nicely, but sometimes I'm doing not well. My stepmother always wants to put me down, when my father is going to work. When my father is not here, I am always angry because of my stepmother. But when I remember my grandparents, who were taking care of me right, I am always crying because my grandparents were loving me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I grow up in times of AIDS. I experienced a lot about AIDS. AIDS is decreasing the population of people in our country.

Most children are left by their parents and they take care of themselves. Some children are orphans – they lost their parents because of this disease. Some children have their sisters and brothers who are clever to take care of them. Their brothers are always looking for good jobs so that they can buy needs for small children and to get food to eat. They are always busy doing their work to help their sisters and brothers and to pay for school fund and buy their school needs.

AIDS is spreading too much because some people do not understand how to protect themselves. They are always sharing infected needles or practising unprotected sex with infected persons.

Some people do not understand how AIDS can be transmitted. AIDS can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding, or through contact with infected blood, transfusion, an operation, an accident or childbirth. People should be abstinent, be faithful to their partners, or rather use condoms so that AIDS can be minimised in Namibia.

“They just take condoms and put them in their wallets”

Shaney, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am a 16-years-old girl and I stay with my parents. My parents are the ones who take care of me. They give me food and take responsibility for me and everything I need.

My parents are responsible for all my school needs. They make sure that I have a pen, a calculator, a school uniform and all other stationeries at school. In addition to what my parents do for me, my sister and my brother also help my parents in meeting some of my school needs, especially paying the school fees.

While my parents on one hand are helping and taking care of my physical needs, they also help me academically on the other hand. They always encourage me to take my study very seriously. They told me education is the key for a better future. Not only that, but my parents also advise me in the things pertaining to life, especially on HIV/AIDS.

I started at Eenhana Primary School in Grade 4 in 2007, and I came to Shimbode Combined School in 2009 for Grade 6. In 2005, we went with my parents to Omusati region to my grandmother, and they left me there. My grandmother took care of me during my stay with her. She also gave me some money on my return home in order to help me with my school needs.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Namibia became a victim of AIDS because people don't want to follow the rules of their parents. Teenagers are the ones who became victims of AIDS as it destroys our nation. Many children became orphans due to AIDS, and many are now vulnerable because of AIDS that makes their parents ill.

If you look at the world, many people are dying because of AIDS. In some houses, orphans are discriminated because their parents are not alive, and this is forcing many of them to go on the streets because there is no one who takes care of them. Their parents, who are responsible for them, have died and now they are being discriminated. Some, they do not pay School Development Fund and do not have school uniforms.

AIDS has much impact on our country's economy because our government spends more money on buying medicine, tablets and contraceptives so that people use them to protect themselves from getting diseases. Although, the government spends more money to buy these, people are not using the medicine and the condoms. They just take condoms and put them in their wallets. AIDS is happy, because it likes those who put condoms in their wallets and do sex without condoms.

If we walk around the world, we realise that many teenagers are infected or victims of AIDS because they do not want to follow their parents rules. Some schools and clinics are closed because teachers and doctors, as well as nurses, have become victims of AIDS.

“They don’t have support”

Lipu, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am staying with my stepfather since 1999, when I was young. My stepfather applied for my school in 2004. He uses to pay for my School Development Fund every year. He told me to study and respect adults at school. He uses to take care of my needs.

My stepfather is a soldier who works at Ondangwa. I always do what he told me to do. He is always telling me to ask whatever I need. He really took and still takes care of me as I am the only boy at home and I do all home chores for boys.

Sometimes during the holidays, I look for job opportunities. This helps me to get some money to pay for my school fees and buy school uniform. Also my mother sometimes is taking care of me. We are many, that's why I pay for my school fees myself as well as for my school uniform. My needs are many and I think, if I was at my father's house, he may help to take care of me as well.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my Experience?

In this world of today, many children become orphans because of HIV/AIDS. Many children stay at home without their parents. Some children lost their father, some have lost their mother, and some of the children are also living with HIV and they don't have support. Some end up on the streets, and some become criminals because they have lost both of their parents.

In this world of today, lots of people are HIV-positive and mostly children are orphans. I think this is because there are no parents to advise the children. They live at their houses without parents. I think it is better for people in communities to advise them. And they must take care of orphans who stay at their houses without their parents.

Many people are HIV-positive because they forced themselves into sex business as sex workers because they don't have their parents to support them either with food or school needs.

“Some classes are without teachers”

Nickson, 15 years old

Who takes care of me?

My biological parents are the ones who take care of me and all my basic needs. Since 2005, when my father passed away, only my mother had the responsibility to take care of me, until I completed Grade 7.

From there, I came to start Grade 8 at a school called Shimbode Combined School. When I came to Shimbode, my siblings started to take care of me, together with my mother. I am happy because they do for me everything. They give me enough food and also buy for me clothes, and they pay for me the School Development Fund.

The moment when I started Grade 8, I was afraid for the first time because my mother and my siblings told me that I would fail. They do not pay for me School Development Fund and they also do not give me money to go and buy my school needs. Fortunately, I passed Grade 8. Now I'm in Grade 9 to be in Grade 10. Until today my mother and my siblings are the ones who take care of me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I grow up in times of AIDS and I experience some problems in many communities. More and more people are becoming ill because of HIV and AIDS. Many people die also because of AIDS, and more children become orphans and vulnerable children (OVC).

This disease also affects education. Some classes are without teachers for a long period of time because teachers who have AIDS are too sick to come to school.

It can also affect the health of other people because more money is lost as a large amount is spent on medicine and medical care for HIV patients. More and more people are seeking health care from health services. This is expensive because health care for HIV and AIDS patients is more expensive than for other types of illnesses.

Also, a death of a breadwinner may result in a loss of income for the family and this brings poverty. This is what I experience in this time of AIDS. It is what I recorded in my mind.

“They do not want me to be far from them”

Mercy, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

As I am a girl of 18 years, I still have my both parents. I am with them in the same house. Each of them do different jobs when it is comes to supporting me. I am happy to have my both parents because both of them support me in a good way. I thank my God who gave me good luck to be with them. I am with them because they do not want me to be far from them while they are still alive.

Some children of my age, they have grown up without seeing both of their parents, or they have only one parent. My parents, they support me and they like me. They help me according to their willing.

My father was a nurse, while my mother was a teacher. I respect them. As years were passing by, they became old and were given a retirement. They receive retirement money and they receive a pension from Epupa.

The biggest supporter is my mother because she always advises me what is wrong and what is bad nowadays. My mother buys for me school uniform, she pays my School Development Fund since the year I started my school until now, she buys my clothes and all my needs.

My father, he likes to buy food, and my mother contributes also. When it comes to the hot time, my mother makes sure that the water is cool, and she prepares enough food to be eaten by me until the time I will be back to school.

I thank for my both parents, and I want to grow up with them if God wants. I thank very much for the support and the good ideas they gave me until this age. God may bless them and add their years so that they will stay for a long time on earth.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Many people in the country, they are all different. Some are HIV-negative and some are HIV-positive. For those who are positive, they got HIV/AIDS in many ways. Many of them died and left their children behind and some are still alive.

In the time of HIV/AIDS I grow up, I experience that families nowadays have few people. Some orphans who were left by their parents, they are just in their homes because there is nobody who can take care of them.

I have learned also that some people who are positive are treated good and some are treated bad in their families. It is the same story with orphans who are positive. Some, they are given less food and stay at unclean places because no one can do the work on their behalf.

For those orphans who were left by their parents, they live in their house alone. They grow enough food in their field and receive food from the government. They also receive assistance from the government, which includes money. They stay with elderly, who can make sure that the money is not used in a wrong way. The elderly will know the needs of the orphans.

When the child becomes positive, the knowledge and the skills will be low in the country due to absenteeism. Teachers will also be sick and children will not continue with their study well. Some children will drop out due to the teacher's absence. Children will not receive enough information about education and the country will not develop anymore. Education will be low in Namibia because of the HIV/AIDS in the country.

Growing up in the times of HIV/AIDS is not good because our country will be underdeveloped, while others will be developed. People will decrease due to HIV/AIDS.

“They look at themselves as if they are no more people”

William, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

The people who are taking care of me are as follows: one is my uncle and the other one is a wife of my uncle. I am staying with both of them, and I am happy to stay with them because I am living a better life.

Both of my parents are having good behaviour, and they are always happy when I am with them. They use to send me to school every day, and they are the ones who pay school fees for me. They treat me as they are treating their child.

When I am not having clothes to wear, they use to buy for me, and they also use to buy for me school stationeries. I am always happy when I am with my parents because they are taking care of their son.

When it comes to food, they are always making sure that they give me enough food to eat so that I can be able to do work well. I love my parents because they take care of me very well and they also love me.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

My experience, when it comes to HIV/AIDS, is that I have learned how HIV can infect one person from the other one. I have also learned the things that a person could do for him/her to protect himself from HIV/AIDS.

HIV cannot be cured, so it means that it is a dangerous disease. The problems that are faced by children who are living with AIDS are many – they are not having a better life, they have always stress because of the disease.

This disease can affect a person when he/she goes for sexual intercourse with an infected person or through blood contact with someone who is HIV-positive. People who are HIV-positive are always ill and weak. They are always asking themselves many questions and they look at themselves as if they are no more people.

Those problems are the ones that are faced by those people who are living with HIV/AIDS. This disease is a danger, and it has affected many people in our country and many of them have died because of this disease.

“Education is the first thing in my life”

Frieda, 20 years old

Who takes care of me?

I stay with my both parents who are responsible to take care of me with my daily needs. My both parents are responsible to buy for me everything for school, like school uniform and a school bag. My mother is responsible to prepare for me food when I go to school and when I come back home. School Development Fund is paid by my both parents every year.

And why I stay with my both parents? I stay with my both parents because I love them, and I help them with the work at home. Sometimes I even help to bring money that supports me. I am happy to stay with my both parents because they advise me to study hard so that I can reach my goal to help my parents in the future.

I am happy to stay with my both parents because all the time they buy for me everything for school. Every time they advise me that I can be with good friends so that we can study very well because the education is the first thing in my life. I can survive in the education because education gives me good things.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In these difficult times of AIDS, there are many children who suffer as orphans because of AIDS, and some become street children. Their parents died because of AIDS, and it puts a strain on the economy in the country to pay money to support the orphans. The government assists them with food, school uniforms and other things.

More money is also used to buy medicine and medical care for AIDS patients.

AIDS makes learners stay at home to take care of their parents and not go to school. AIDS also causes teachers not to come to work. This makes the government hire non-Namibian teachers, and still it has to pay the teachers who are on sick leave.

Our population will get smaller as more people die due to AIDS. The most people die in the age group from 25 to 49 years, which is bad. Now the government needs to spend more money to pay old people's pensions.

AIDS is bad for the families because it makes them discriminate those who are HIV-positive. People separate because of AIDS. And many people will starve and work without proper pay because of AIDS.

“This disease became our enemy”

Theopolina, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

My name is Theopolina, I am an 18-years-old girl. I am currently in Grade 9 at Shimbode Combined School. I have three sisters and I don't have any brothers. I am the firstborn of my mother and my father.

They decided to take me to my grandmother (father's mother) when I was seven years old because she was not able to work on her own to earn a living and to support me. My parents took care of me for all my school needs, such as school uniform, School Development Fund, pens, calculators and other stationeries. Now my mother is sick, she is no longer able to take care of me, and my father passed away in August 2012.

I do not receive money from the government. Only my grandmother takes care of me. When it comes to clothes, my parents used to buy for me different clothes and sometimes they used to give me money and I went to buy whatever I wanted. Now I am receiving some support from my aunt who buys me soap and other things.

My father was responsible to send food to me. Now it is only my grandmother who gives me food, and my aunt who also sends food to me sometimes.

I still remember my mother who is sick and my father who has passed away this year. Although my needs and my love is not enough, there is nothing I can do. That is what God wanted. I just study very hard.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I was ten years old, I was hearing that Namibia became the victim of HIV and AIDS, the killer disease that kills almost all people and causes children to become orphans and some to become street children because there is no housekeeper in their houses anymore.

Some families become poor because the people who were working in the family are the people infected with HIV and AIDS.

When I'm looking at our society, most people are infected with HIV and AIDS. Some, they follow the instructions that are given by the doctors and some, they do not want to understand what the doctors said. They do not want to learn from other people's mistakes.

When I heard that Namibia became a victim of HIV and AIDS, I was very disappointed because the first time I heard it, I heard it in a wrong way. As a result, this disease became our enemy because it causes many problems.

As we see, many children become orphans, and some get pregnant because there are no people who take care of them and who tell them about the right things and the wrong things. We know that children depend on their parents to tell them their mistakes.

I want to advice all the Namibian people and all people in our neighbouring countries to use contraceptives safely when they prefer sex in order to save lives.

“It has never been easy for me since my parents died”

Johanna, 18 years old

Who takes care of me?

I live with my grandmother who is responsible to take care of me. The problem that led me to live with my grandmother to take care of me is that my parents died, and now I am an orphan.

My grandmother is the one who is responsible to give me my school needs, like buying uniform, shoes and school stationeries, and to take care of me by giving me food to eat.

I would like to thank my grandmother for taking care of me so that I cannot think of my parents. My grandmother treats me as my parents used to treat me. My grandmother is also helping me to do some work for school, and she is giving me some ideas to do work. I want my grandmother to live longer and to raise me to be a good child.

It has never been easy for me since my parents died and I think of them every now and then. But I receive money from the government to help me, and my grandmother gives ideas on how to respect others.

Since I receive the social grant, now I am living healthy, and it lets me not think of my parents anymore, and my grandmother told me that she will never treat me in bad way because it can make me think of my parents.

I would like to say thank you, my guardian, for taking care of me. Now I am looking like others who have their parents, so I thank you, my grandmother. May God bless you to live longer.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

As we all know, AIDS is the disease that affects most of the Namibians, especially youths. It causes many problems to the parents and children. Some children are just staying in the home to take care of their parents who are infected by the disease, and that causes more absenteeism of the learners at school.

When it comes to the school needs, parents in the home, they might not get enough money to buy school stationeries as money is wasted by people who are suffering of AIDS by buying medicines and healthy food to feed them. And the government just spends more money for people who are infected by the disease.

When it comes to the children who are orphans because of AIDS, it affects them in a bad way. These children will not survive well when it comes to food because more money is used up by the family members to buy food for them to eat and medicines for them to prolong their life. So money is just used up by family, and that causes the orphans to survive in a bad condition because there is no money to buy food to eat for the children who are orphans.

When it comes to the clothes and care, it also affects them because parents who should be able to buy clothes for their children and to take care of them have passed away. And children may suffer because there is no one who is going to take care of them by giving them enough love and care.

Children are very affected by the death of their parents because, when it comes to school, there is nobody who is responsible to feed them and buy school uniform for them and shoes, also school stationeries, and all the things that let them survive. They are always thinking of their parents to take care of them. Sometimes it causes high blood pressure to children because they always keep on thinking of their parents as they want their parents to come back to the world, and that causes their mind to go mad.

I would like to say sorry to those children who had their parents die of AIDS. Let them rest in peace and do not have envy.

“If you offer a child to somebody, you don’t have to be responsible for that child anymore”

Lavinia, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

From 1997 to 2000, I was with my grandmother. Later on, God took her away from us at the beginning of 2001. At that time, I was in kinder garden and I was getting all the support from her.

After my grandmother ended her single life, my uncle was taking over my care. He was giving me all the support as it was exactly done by my grandmother. In 2003, my uncle found a job at Ondangwa and married Ms Tresia, who is very kind and good with people.

In 2003, I have started my school at a nearby school at Onehova. Ms Tresia was the one who was looking after me because uncle was at work. Her way of living was astonishing to me because she always showed adoration towards me. Even people who didn’t know me exactly, they just thought I am a daughter of Ms Tresia. Everything at home was going well, and all the works were done accordingly. Always, at the end of the month, my uncle has to come home to exchange greetings with us.

In 2009, I was in Grade 7, and I had to apply for another school because Onehova was a Primary School. So I had to separate from my uncle and Ms Tresia, but it was not easy! So separateness came, and I moved to Shimbode to go further with my study.

Even though I was at Shimbode, I was still under their support. They provide me with food and all the essentials that they can afford. Everything is going well at Shimbode. Always after two weeks, I have to go back home! Because I am a hard worker, I only spent three years at Shimbode, and this year is my last year at Shimbode because I am doing Grade 10.

My mother and father they are still alive, but they don’t give support to me because there is a belief that says: “If you offer a child to somebody, you don’t have to be responsible for that child anymore.” So Ms Tresia and my uncle are the ones who are taking care of me up to today!

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I am very aware that HIV/AIDS is a killer disease which has no cure up to today! It has only ARVs that will help to prolong the life of an affected person. It doesn’t matter how old you are, or how poor or rich you are, or at what tribes you belong, no! And you cannot identify an affected person by just looking at somebody physically.

HIV spreads in the way that every young somebody knows by today. The use of condoms and sticking to one partner is a common way to prevent it. It has a negative effect on the family and also to the nation.

Some people who have been affected by HIV/AIDS are the breadwinners of the family and they are even the state of the nation. So they end up not attending their work anymore due to the illness of HIV/AIDS.

Thousands of people have died of HIV/AIDS. Many children became orphans and vulnerable due to HIV/AIDS. Many children are living in ways that cannot be accepted. Some are being buried by today. Some they don't attend schools due to poor support by those who are living with them. Some, they don't have homes where they come from, they are just in the streets because of poor support and mistreating of children.

So the government took that problem of children being mistreated and not attending school and put it in consideration. And by now, many orphans and vulnerable children are receiving assistance from the government!

“I live with my grandmother to help her”

Andreas, 19 years old

Who takes care of me?

My grandmother, who has born my mother, is the one who takes care of me in a polite way. I live in the house of my grandmother in a village nearby the boundary of Namibia and Angola.

I am always so happy when I'm staying with my grandmother, simply because every day and night she tells me many different old fine stories that are good to listen. They make me happy and proud.

I live with my grandmother to help her to do work or jobs that are difficult for her to do, like ploughing, pounding [*mahangu* – pearl millet], looking after cattle and other jobs. My life is so good because she put me in school to learn more knowledge and still to do something, and I am performing with good grades in the school.

My grandmother gives me time to do my regular exercise so that I can be more mentally alert and more effective in learning or doing tasks that require me to think. I always live in a healthy way and have enough food to eat every day.

My grandmother gives me money to pay my School Development Fund, and she gives me money to buy all my needs for school, but also my father helps my grandmother with paying School Development Fund and buying my school uniform.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I think this disease needs to be reduced in our nation. People need to take care of themselves so that the spread of the disease can go down. This syndrome called AIDS infected many people in our country. It destroyed the economy of our country because we do not have a cure for it. When it affects a person, the person will probably die of it, and so it causes many deaths of the Namibians.

Many people or children in our nation are living in the houses without a single parent. Some are living with stepfathers or stepmothers, which causes a big problem to children. Some people are treating the orphans in a bad way by giving them less food to eat, beating them and giving them works or jobs that are difficult to do for children. Some people even tell the children that it was him/her who brought the death of his/her parents, and this discrimination is not fair.

The people need to use contraceptives and make family planning so that they can reduce the infections of AIDS in our country. Abstinence is the best way to reduce AIDS in our nation. When you don't abstain, you better use a condom or femidom. It is important for both, mother and father or boys and girls, to use contraceptives and to test every month.

“In the afternoon, people heard my crying”

Anna, 15 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am taken care of by my auntie. I am living with my auntie and her husband in Epinga village in the North. I was originally born in the North. I was given to my auntie by my parents because she did a lot for me when I was young. This is because one day my mother decided to go to Windhoek and, during that time, I was only one year and nine months old.

That day my mother woke me up early, she took her bag and put it on her back and covered it with those kinds of blankets that are used to cover and protect babies. She left me in a hut sleeping, without telling anyone that she left me behind. In the afternoon, people heard my crying and were very surprised.

From there on, my auntie started to take care of me. She washed my nappies, my clothes and myself. She took me to the hospital when I was sick. She treated me as her little baby because she felt sympathetically for me. When mother returned, she found me as a grown up girl. From there, she decided that I must go to live with auntie at Epinga, and I went there in 2006. My auntie does not work and her husband too. Their income is from running small businesses, like selling *otombo* [beer] and *okapana* [meat].

Life is very difficult sometimes because the business does not go well sometimes. We might go on for a week without lotion or soap, or even cooking oil. But we have enough food because we grow our own maize, beans, *mahangu* [pearl millet] and sorghum at home. In times of drought, we usually go and buy *mahangu* or maize from Angola.

I am really happy with the life I am living with my auntie, even though we have problems with our daily needs. My aunt is a good adviser, and she takes good care of me. She will never let you go in the water with shoes and for that I love my aunt!

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

The AIDS pandemic has really destroyed our nation, and it had hampered our countries economic development. It killed thousands of people. Most of the people are still in hospitals and some are still on treatment.

This disease has a very negative impact. It made many of our children be orphans. It made many people lose their jobs so they can take care of the infected ones. It made many children dropping school to take care of the sick people. It made our country to spend a lot of money on ARVs. It made our businessmen/-women inactive, leading to decline in profit.

Some orphans in our country are not getting assistance from the government. They do not receive social grants and some of these orphans, their parents died due to AIDS. They only run small businesses for survival. I think that Namibian government must relook the situation these orphans are living in.

Everywhere people are talking about AIDS, but people still do not understand. In schools, clinics, hospitals, churches and everywhere people are preaching about the disease, but there is no difference. This disease has caused us to face a tough future. We must abstain – say “No!” to sex, please! Please, let’s stick to one partner and use condoms when involved in sexual activities.

“They become street children or thieves”

Elago, 19 years old

Who takes care of me?

I live with my both parents. They love me so much. I grew up with them and until now I am with them. My parents have done very good things for me when I was young, and still they are taking care of me.

When I was younger, my mother took me to my grandmother to take care of me. At the age of five, my father said I must come back to our house. My father was an employee at that time and my mother was unemployed.

My father takes care of me for all my wants and needs. My father was responsible for paying my school fees from Grade 1 until high institution. My father also pays for my other needs, e.g. clothes. He bought for me things like shoes and other things. My father also buys some things like soap, toothpaste and others. My mother is only earning little from selling agricultural products, and she uses to take care of me with the profit she gets.

My parents also provide me with enough money for journeys, like going on holiday. I know that I will work hard in my study for me to benefit, so I can take care of myself. I love my parents because they take care of me since I was younger until now.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

AIDS is a major disease that affects the economies of countries in the world. This disease brings countries’ economies to be failures as many people are affected by HIV/AIDS. Some of the countries in the world have low populations because of HIV/AIDS.

There is no cure for this disease, but there are tablets that prolong the life of an infected person. Many workers lost their jobs because of that disease. Children die before the age of three or four months if they were born infected. If learners became orphans, they drop out of school because there is no one who can take care of them. If teachers die, the school will be closed down, and this reduces the economy of our country. If learners drop out of school, they become street children or thieves.

HIV/AIDS causes people to die. Most of the youths die because of HIV/AIDS. If many people are affected by the disease, the government will spend much money on buying ARVs. The government must provide awareness campaigns for the people in the country. It must also provide people with enough ARVs. People must stop polygamy as it is the major contribution to increase of HIV/AIDS. People must also abstain and say no to sex, or condomise to prevent the spreading of the virus. HIV/AIDS is a big problem!

“My biological parents take care of me, but we are not in the same village”

David, 19 years

Who takes care of me?

As all the parents have a responsibility for their children, I am also with biological parents. I am with my biological parents from the time I was young until now. I have been taken care of by my parents because I am in school. They pay for all the school needs or materials.

As I said, I am being with my parents. They have a responsibility for my needs. Unfortunately, they are not working, but we share the little that they have. They pay for me School Development Fund (SDF), buy for me school uniform and other property I need. They always have a responsibility for my needs.

My biological parents take care of me, but we are not in the same village. They come along with clothes, food and my stationery. Sometimes they send money through the bank.

I want to thank my parents because they take care of me from the time I was young until now. When we are in the house, there is no bad treatment.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

In the world, many people become victims of AIDS. Children become orphans because of AIDS. They are no longer going to school. AIDS affects the nation because many adults lose their jobs. It is getting a problem to the world because many adults are affected.

Children are becoming orphans. Some of them, they become street children because their parents are dead. Children are discriminated either by their stepmother or stepfather. They are treated in bad ways. Some of them they don't have enough food to feed themselves. Some of them, they drop out of school because of a lack of money for paying the SDF.

As we all know, some orphans get a social grant from the government, but parents waste it. Instead of buying food or stationery, they just spend the money to buy alcohol. When they come home, they just beat the children without any reason.

AIDS is getting a problem in the country because children are not with their biological parents. Children are treated badly. Teachers are not coming to workplace because they are affected. Many children, they drop out of school because their parents do not have money. Parents who take care of orphans must stop discriminating children. Children need love.

“It causes children to prostitute”

Jonas, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

It is obvious that children are cared by their parents. I am also taken care of by my grandmother because, when I was born, she decided that I should stay with her to help her with the household chores, e.g. collecting firewood, fetching water and pounding millet.

I started school in 2004 at Shimbode, and my grandmother has been responsible for ensuring that my needs are satisfied.

My mom supports me with all school needs, but when it comes to School Development Fund, my grandmother is responsible of it mostly. She helps me with my school activities.

I am always happy at school because I look like my friends, wearing school uniform or having lunch box during the break time. My mom assists me with paying the fees when arrangements are made.

When it comes to food, we plough our field to get food, so we can survive during the dry season, and sometimes my grandmother buys millet when it gets finished.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

When I look around, HIV/AIDS affect our society, and the number of people who are infected with HIV has increased in our society, so it causes children to prostitute in order to get food and shelter because there is no housekeeper.

Due to the high percentage of HIV/AIDS, most families lost their breadwinner. The skills and knowledge of many workers have been lost, and they leave a gap in their position. Many children become orphans after that. Some will live in poverty, and so they force the government to provide them with money, but still the rate is just going up.

The increase of that killer disease in the society is challenging because some children drop out of school because there is no money to pay School Development Fund. And so the number of people who are infected by the killer disease is very high.

Private companies close down because employees are too weak to work or they died of AIDS. This reduces the country's economy because there are no more enough taxes from private sectors. People who were employees in the private sector also lose their jobs and become more depending on the government.

People must use contraceptives in order to save lives.

“I receive some money from the government”

Lydia, 19 years old

Who takes care of me?

My mother takes care of me. She is the only one who has the responsibility for me. This happened after my father passed away. She provides me with food and meets my school needs as well as clothing.

Mother always makes sure that there is enough food in the house for me to eat, particularly when the field did not yield enough that year. She always makes sure to buy some food to supplement the harvested one. Every day she prepares for me the breakfast in the morning, before I leave for school, and the lunch in the afternoon, when I return back home from school.

About the school needs, I receive some money from the government to support myself. The government does this through the program of the OVC grant that is offered to all school-going children who are orphans or vulnerable. As an orphan, I got exempted from paying school fee. The government grant also helped me to purchase a school uniform.

When I was too young, my mother took the responsibility to purchase me the clothes. Even though she still buys, now some of my cousins are also sending me some money in order to cover my extra problems.

Growing up in time of AIDS: What is my experience?

I experienced that many children become orphans and the cause is AIDS. NOW! Some children are in the house without parents because they have passed away, and some children are in the streets. If the children became orphans, some they become thieves, especially the boys. This is caused when the children do not have anyone or a parent who takes care.

Our population will decrease as there is an increase of the mortality rate due to AIDS. The majority of deaths are among the age group of 25-45 years.

It disappoints me because AIDS is an incurable disease. The best way is only to prevent yourself from being in danger of that disease. This disease will cause our economy to decrease because lots of money the government uses in order to buy medicine that infected people use to prolong their life.

In many schools, especially in Ohangwena region, there are not enough materials that learners can use in order to improve their study, such as books, and in many cases you find the learners sharing the tables and chairs.

Even though the government made up some improvements and offers money to the orphans, it cannot cover all the needs of the children. So this money can be used to purchase the school uniforms and to pay school fees as the orphaned children are in problems.

In this case, I desire to tell people that, in order to cover our life, let's prevent ourselves from this disease as to prevent is better than to cure!

“The reason why I am not with my parents is simply because they have passed away”

Fransina, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am a girl of 16 years, currently doing Grade 9. The main person who takes care of me is my aunt. The reason why I am not with my parents is simply because they have passed away. Therefore, my aunt decided to take care of me.

When it comes to school needs, I receive some money from the government each month. I use it for my school needs, especially to pay my School Development Fund (SDF), and also to buy my school uniform and my school stationeries.

I get food from my aunt who takes care of me. She feeds me enough. Some money that I use to buy food comes from the money that I get from the government.

My aunt gives me some money to buy my needs, and sometimes she is the one who buys clothes for me. Although my need is not enough, it is correct because I just receive 200 Namibian dollars from the government each month, and I have many needs, and my aunt does not have any work.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

As I looked around in our society, I noticed that our society became a victim of HIV and AIDS, the killer disease. I decided that most people in our society are more suffering because of this disease, especially teenagers. Most children are left in poverty because food in the house, it might get finished up, and if there are no judges, it will be difficult to survive.

Most children became orphans and vulnerable children and many of them became street kids because the parents died of HIV and AIDS. Therefore, no one can take care of them.

As the society became a victim of this killer disease, most orphans became thieves because there is no where they can get their needs because their parents who took care of them, they have passed away.

Many people died because of HIV and some, they will live a difficult life because they are positive. The government spends a lot of money to assist the people who are HIV-positive.

Many teachers at the different schools leave the classes because they are sick. Children also leave the school because of HIV.

Young people must abstain (not have sex at all) to save their life until their time will come. The older people must be faithful to one partner and use condoms to minimise the disease.

“Finding myself under a dark cloud”

Lucia, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

My biological father is the one who takes care of me. It was devastating news, getting my result with the sign ‘positive’, finding myself under a dark cloud that fell upon us, Namibians. I was questioning myself: Who will take care of me? Will there be someone to help me with my needs and happiness?

Although this was a shocking situation, I was not stressed. My parents looked after me as they usually did it, mother used to cook food for me, while my father kept on reminding me when it is time to take my medication and to listen to programs that offer information concerning the spread of the disease. My father uses to go to meetings and comes to explain it to me.

My friends always look after me. They come and visit me during their spare time. They explain to me what their life science teacher was telling them concerning the disease. They advise me that if you are infected, it will change your lifestyle. They tell me to eat healthy food, to take my medicine as instructed by the doctor and to live at a clean place as this will help me to live longer.

My needs were reached, although I was not suspecting it to happen. My parents, friends and my relatives show me love. They always take care of me by telling me about the importance of being educated, and they use to come to me, and we read our books together.

My father is the one in charge of my school needs, it is not that much because we pay only 50 Namibian dollars for the whole year. He buys for me pencils and pens for writing my summary and the files to keep my documents. He buys for me school uniform as well as school bag to keep my books protected and all my school needs, so I can be like my fellow learners. I did not say much about money because I receive a social grant from the government.

As a summary, I just want to advise all the victims to stop thinking of death, but to remain positive. That is not the end of the world, and those who are not infected, let us practise prevention as it's better than care.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I grew up in Omatunda with my family. Although my parents are the ones who raise me up, growing up in times of AIDS with different experiences was a shock to me.

My performance at school was not good as I used to be too late when going to school because my place is far from school. There were only few schools in Ohangwena as the money was used up to help people who are suffering from the disease in terms of buying expensive medicines (ARVs) that will help these people to live longer.

The government spends the money for buying contraceptives, which will lead to lowering the spreading of the disease, buying healthy food for the infected people and building more clinics to make sure that the treatment will be better.

In the communities, this dark cloud left many children motherless, and this is devastating when it comes to children under the age of 18 years. They are usually isolated. They fall pregnant at early stage because they use to sell their body in order to get money for their living standard to

be better. They become criminals addicted to alcohol and sometimes blame their parents for not taking care of themselves.

When it comes to homes, the guardians never give love to these children, or protection and care. They always blame their parents and shout that these children are shallow-minded like their parents, gossiping that their parents died because of the disease.

The increase of orphans in our country affects our school performance too. Motherless children never pay attention to the teacher, especially if he/she is used to be abused at home. Absence is very high. They are given work at home by their stepmother or father and this causes poor performance in school that leads to an increase of children on the streets.

To sum up, let us all fight against mistreating of orphans and give them care, love and support always as we don't know what the future holds for us.

“Relatives are abusing them as they are useless”

Paulus, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

My grandmother has been taking care of me since I was five years old up to today. I am with her because my mother died in 1998 at Ongungila.

Now, I live at Onaupanya in Ohangwena region in my grandmother's house, and she is still taking care of me. She buys my schools needs and other personal needs. Most of the time, she gives me 100 Namibian dollars to go and buy my own clothes, and she buys food that we eat.

I have many needs and 100 Namibian dollars per month is not enough for transport, food and other things. I used to save money for some months so that it will be enough for the things that I want to buy, and this makes me to suffer a lot. Sometimes I want to go to church, but I don't have shoes. Sometimes I use to borrow clothes from my friends and, if their things get damaged, they make me to pay it.

I think the most important thing to do is that my grandmother has to give money to my brother so that they will have to buy my needs, but not giving me the money. It takes a lot of time for me to save money, and if she gives the money to my brother, it will be safe.

What I think must be done is that the government must do an organisation that will help orphans and vulnerable children to buy them school needs and the remaining money will be used for their food. I think that will reduce their school dropout.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

Namibia is one of the countries that are affected by HIV/AIDS. It affects mostly teenage people, and this is mostly caused by unprotected sex, car accident and during breastfeeding.

People who are HIV-positive, they are living in a very bad condition because their relatives are abusing them as they are useless. That habit encourages HIV-positive people to kill themselves.

HIV-positive people, they don't have a bright future anymore because they have to go for sick leave and if they get sick, they are going to be replaced. All infected learners that are in schools, they don't have to attend the full study because they have to spend time going to the hospital.

People that are living with HIV-positive people, they must take care of them by providing them with food, cleaning their clothes and washing them. They must not abuse them by insulting them, and they must know that they also need love.

When HIV-positive people are dying, they are increasing the death rate, and when the virus is spread from one person to another, the percentage of infected people is increasing. The government spends lots of money to buy medicine, and the development of our country is going down because the money is being used up.

I think what must be done is that the Namibian people, the youths, they must use all necessary steps to protect themselves. People must use condoms to protect themselves and reduce the number of infected people in our country.

“If I play around with my life while I am still young, I will suffer”

Saima, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

I'm with my mother and she is the one who takes care of me. She buys for me my school needs and some of my stationeries. I am staying with my mother because my parents, they are not in the same house.

My mother uses to advise me about the things of today that youths do and tells me about education. She uses to help me with my schoolwork, exactly with Oshikwanyama language. My mother tells me to study hard and pass to the next grade. She uses to tell me that if I play around with my life while I am still young, I will suffer.

I use to remember what she told me and ask myself a question about my father who did not take care of me. I force myself to study hard, without playing.

My mother also uses to tell me things that I can do and things that I'm not allowed to do. She told me that education is the key and I need to take it as a crucial thing in my life. My mother likes me and I respect her. And I use to do everything she told me and ask her some questions, when I do not understand clearly.

My father sometimes used to buy for me staple food and other needs. He also advises me, and I am willing to hear the advice of my father.

I thank my mother for taking care of me and for her advice, and for arguing me to do things that are crucial and to concentrate on my schoolwork. I also thank my father for buying for me my staple food and stationeries.

Growing up in times of HIV/AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV and AIDS has many results. Many children became orphans because of this disease. Some children are on the streets and dropped out of school because their parents passed away.

I learned how HIV/AIDS can spread from one person to another person: through contaminated blood transfusion, other contact with infected blood and practising unprotected sex with an infected person.

When you have multiple partners, you have a moral responsibility to prevent the disease. But HIV and AIDS cannot affect you when you are eating from the same plate with an infected person, kissing, hugging and taking a bath with an infected person.

HIV and AIDS is also affecting the Namibian economy because people who are the pillar of this nation, they are also infected. Some people left their jobs. Because of this disease, they have been absent from work. It also affects some families in food production because, if a person dies and she/he has the responsibility to buy the staple food in their family, it causes poverty in that family.

“I am also not living with my mother because she has no jobs”

Hilkka, 16 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am taken care of by my father and my stepmother. They are the ones who give me food and follow my needs when it comes to stationeries. My school uniform, they bought it for me. They care for my studies by buying my examination materials.

They always do good things to me. They do not treat me badly, they really love me. They always make sure that I'm satisfied with all my basic needs. They also use to ask me if there is some need I want. I am happy to be with them because they satisfy all my needs, love me, treat me fairly and respect my rights. I am also proud to be with them because they always make sure that, during the examination, all the educational needs are bought and brought at the time so that I will study without a problem so that I can make it.

I am not living with my mother since I turned three years. What makes me not live with my mother is that she gave me to my father to take care of me and live with my stepmother who married my father. I am also not living with my mother because she has no jobs to get money to buy all my needs. So this is also a reason. So since I have turned three years until today, I am staying with my father and my stepmother as a result of the mentioned things.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

As I grow up in times of AIDS, I have realised that AIDS has killed many people and that results in people becoming orphans. This leads to poverty as breadwinners are dying.

AIDS is destroying the nation and leads to a decrease of the population. It is also affecting people who are in schools because when breadwinners are dying, this leads to withdrawal of children from schools and to a life in poverty and poor condition. Some orphans, as a result of HIV/AIDS, they are in a bad condition, and some are taken care of well and are given assistance from the government.

I have also realised that AIDS is causing too many deaths as a result. In addition, AIDS has got an impact on human resources because infected workers lose interest in their work, and the expenditures of the government and other HIV/AIDS-related institutions also increase.

I have also realised that HIV/AIDS has an impact on food production in the country because, since the number of productive workers is decreasing due to HIV/AIDS-related diseases, agricultural products will decline, so food production is seriously affected.

“Aunty supports me with everything I need”

Hileni, 17 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am taken care of by my aunty. I came to live with my aunty in the year 2005, when my parents moved me from school in the east to this school, where there are further grades. By that time, I was under the care and support of my grandmother, but, in the year 2012, she passed away, and aunty took the responsibility of support on her behalf.

Currently, aunty supports me with everything I need, especially when it comes to the daily needs. She buys soaps, body lotions, clothes and other needs for me. She is the responsible person who pays my school fees and buys for me school stationeries.

Although we are many in the family, aunty ensures that we are having enough food to eat. She does not care how much money it costs her because she is the only breadwinner in the family.

Even though both of my parents are alive, they do not take much care of me as aunty does because they are living in a distant village. I am so happy to be with my auntie for all the support she gives to me. Even if a year passes by without seeing my parents, I don't mind a lot because aunty is the one who supports and cares for me.

Growing in up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

I have experienced a lot from this world of AIDS. Even though I am not infected by the deadly disease, it has really affected me, the society and the country at large.

More and more children are becoming orphans due to AIDS deaths. This leads to an increased demand of orphanages to protect the AIDS orphans. The government has to spend more money on educating AIDS orphans and create safety for them. Children who are victimised and discriminated in the communities due to the fact that their parents died of AIDS usually live on the streets, causing the government to provide safety for them. All these factors reduce the country's economy.

Apart from the effect AIDS has on the economy, individuals are also affected. AIDS orphans often become school dropouts because there is nobody to provide food for them at home or when they come to school. Those who are inherited are usually mistreated, which reduces their academic performance.

Not only the orphans are affected themselves, but their peers too! Most children feel pity for their friends who are orphans because of AIDS, while some stop loving them in fear that they may also be infected.

HIV/AIDS affects everybody in the country as well as internationally. The government can no longer support all the citizens due to the increased AIDS output. Some private workers die of AIDS, reducing the country's income as there is a decrease on the tax paid by individual companies. AIDS deaths and infections cause a widespread human resource need. Skills and knowledge are lost as more people die of AIDS, while others become responsible of taking care of them.

Growing up in this world of AIDS, I have really experienced a lot! There are some people in the society who are fighting against the spread of the disease, while others are antagonists. AIDS is really devastating the nation!

“I take care of myself at times”

Lazarus, 19 years old

Who takes care of me?

At first, when I was born, my mother was taking care of me. After two years, she was taking me to my grandmother who has born her. She took me to my grandmother because she had not yet completed her school, therefore she had to return to school. Since then, my grandmother is the one who takes care of me, while my mother is far from me.

My grandmother, she loves me so much and she buys me clothes, food and stationeries. She also provides for me a lunch when I go to school. What caused my mother to move from that place? When my mother grew up and completed her education, she got married to my father and they moved to a place where there was a good land for cultivation.

No matter that I do not stay with my both parents, they also support me financially to buy my social needs like soaps, toothpaste as well as to pay my School Development Fund.

Now I am getting older. Even though I am not with a parent, I take care of myself at times. I use to do work and get income.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

HIV/AIDS is a harmful disease that kills and infects almost 1 000 people in our country and it has no cure, there is only some medicine that prolongs the life of infected people.

HIV/AIDS, it kills our leaders, parents and children. What I hear and see all over the world is that more children are becoming orphans because of that disease. Some children, they are born and they die within a short period of time between two to five months. More children, they drop out of school and go on the streets because there is no one who pays for them the School Development Fund and no one who buys for them food, school uniform and soap.

This disease is decreasing the number of people in our country. Breadwinners are lost in houses and they leave children behind. The government should support these orphans financially so that they can afford to pay for their school fees and buy their food, clothes and other needs.

“My grandmother is my only parent”

Johannes, 19 years old

Who takes care of me?

I am staying with my grandmother who is taking care of me. My grandmother is my only parent who helps me and gives me food every time. One of my parents left me there when I was a small boy.

I have only my mother, but she is very far from me. That is why my grandmother is my only parent who is taking care of me at this time. I am an orphan, and I receive some help from the government, such as money and school uniform.

When I am with my grandmother, my grandmother is only helping me sometimes to buy my clothes and to pay my school fees, but mostly she only likes to give me food.

My mother is my only parent who has the possibility to pay the school fees all the time and to buy me some clothes, like a jacket during the winter time. And also my mother gives me some extra money for going to a clinic or hospital when I am sick. I am also helped by my stepfather who married my mother. He helps me to buy for me clothes and to pay my school fees sometimes.

My grandmother, she loves me very much because I am working hard in our house. I am healthy because every morning she collected food for me to eat, when I was a small boy under ten years old. But this time, my grandmother is too old, that's why at this time, I am the one who has the responsibility for all the things that are needed by my grandmother.

In our house, there are only two people who are going for a job, but they only give me clothes and food sometimes. Our government also helps at the end of the month. That money I am using to buy all the school products, like calculator and school uniform and to pay school fees.

Growing up in times of AIDS: What is my experience?

As I am growing up in the nation of AIDS, I learned more about this disease. This time I know that this disease is for a long time in our country, and it is affecting our country very much.

I am learning more about this disease and how it affects our country. I know that most of the people die of AIDS, and it causes a high number of deaths in our country. The population of our country decreases. Most of the children, they have lost their parents, and the number of orphans increases at a high level. It will take a lot of time for our government to help all the orphans.

I have also learned more about people who have AIDS. Most of the AIDS people are living a bad life because the family does not want a person who has AIDS. But our government needs to tell the people of our country to stop these things because it also causes a high death rate in our country.

I also learned more about this disease. Some people, when they go for testing and the doctor tells them that they have AIDS, they kill themselves with a gun or a rope.

But at this time, you need to go to a New Start Center or to your friend, who you know that he/she is good person, and tell your friend that you have HIV, he will advise you. I think this way we will solve the high death rate in our country.

I also learned more about what types of food you need to eat to be healthy. I know that you need to eat food like meat, fish, eggs and maize. This is the food you need to eat when you have AIDS.

I also know that if you have AIDS, avoid yourself from drinking alcohol because alcohol is also damaging your brain and your health will go down.

At this time, when I am growing up in the nation of AIDS, I learned more about how you can prevent yourself from getting AIDS. You only need to use a condom and to abstain. I know to abstain is most important. You shall never have sex until you are married.

Social crisis and social powers: A child-headed household in the north of Namibia

Editors' Note, a village near Ondangwa (Oshana Region), October 2012

Veronica (17 years old) and her brother Jonas (6 years old) live in the rural northern part of Namibia, near the town of Ondangwa. They attend a small school with 64 learners nearby their house. Veronica is almost deaf. Nevertheless, the school admitted her so that at least she can have one secure meal per day. The school benefits from the Namibian School Feeding Programme.

Besides that, Veronica and Jonas have to take care of themselves. They live in the *okagumbo* [homestead] of their late granny. The mother left the children with the grandmother many years ago. The teachers say she lives as a street woman in Windhoek. There is no contact between the children and their mother. The children have different fathers: Veronica's father passed away and Jonas' father – "he is useless," the teacher comments. Sometimes an aunty comes to look after the children.

The teachers complain about neighbours who exploit the kids. They are misusing them to run errands and to work for them, giving them only one or two dollars sometimes. They also mention a young man from the neighbourhood who offers the children to sleep in his house when they are afraid to stay alone in the night. The teachers, the social worker and a staff member of the Red Cross are suspecting the man wants to sleep with the girl.

Sometimes boys from the neighbourhood stay overnight in Veronica and Jonas' house, which makes the teachers also feel disquiet. "A girl living without a caretaker is constantly in danger of being raped," they say. "The Red Cross brought school uniforms, books, pens, soap, toothpaste, blankets and food for the children. We bought a lock for the door of their sleeping room because sometimes, when the children come home from school, they find that things are stolen from their house."

If there is food, Veronica cooks for herself and her brother in the evenings at an open fire. The children share their sleeping room. One bed is used to store their belongings and the other bed, they both sleep in. Nearby the sleeping hut, they observe a snake always looking for the chickens that are inside the hut. Veronica and Red Cross volunteer Rosalia carefully sweep under the beds looking for the snake.



Veronica and Jonas are living alone in their late grandmother's house.
Their only secure food is the maize porridge they get at school.

Chapter 3

"Who takes care of me?
Growing up in times of AIDS"

"I grew up like an orphan"

Essay by Justina Vatilange Matatias, Swakopmund



“I grew up like an orphan”

Justina Vatilange Matatias, Swakopmund

Winner of an essay competition announced in The Namibian in November 2012, entitled “Who takes care of me? Growing up in times of AIDS”

In life, I realised something. I realised that care is very important for everyone. Let me share my true story with the youth of Namibia. I’m a 15-year-old girl, doing Grade 8 in Swakopmund in Erongo region. I grew up with my aunt. I learnt a lot in life. I came with her to Swakop in 2004. Then, in 2005, I started Grade 1 at Festus Gonteb Junior Primary School.

Living with my aunt, I went through thick and thin, but I’m still strong and standing.

I grew up far away from my biological parents. I didn’t receive any care or love from them. I grew up like an orphan, and my aunt treated me so badly that I even wanted to take my own life. She promised my parents to take care of me and to treat me as if I was her own daughter, but she didn’t fulfill her promise to my parents. However, she secured a place in a school for me, which I’m very grateful for.

My mother is an Angolan, while my father is from Namibia. When they separated from each other in 2007, my mother went back to her country, and that was the last time I saw her. I only got to meet with her again in August this year, when I went the extra mile to look for her in Angola.

I never visited my mother while she was in Namibia because I was treated like a slave. My aunt didn’t like it when I wanted to visit my mother. I cried day and night. I always prayed, but it seemed that God did not hear my prayers. Finally, God answered my prayer and I moved out of my aunt’s house.

I am now living with Samaritans. At the moment, these good Samaritans are taking care of me with some assistance from my dad. They treat me like their biological child, maybe because God didn’t bless them with kids. I’m like their only biological kid now.

I believed that, whether your parents are alive or not, it won’t make any difference unless you are living with them. All you need to do as an individual is just to be self-confident and have a high self-esteem. I believe that, with God, everything is possible.

Talking from my own experience, I suffered like an orphan, but my parents are still alive. I used to do all the chores and went to school with an empty stomach. I worked like a nanny, but still that didn’t affect my schoolwork. I’m just as smart as a star. It’s very hard to grow up far away from your parents, especially if they are alive.

We know that, in our country, people are dying of HIV/AIDS. The number of orphans is just skyrocketing every day. It’s very painful when you lost your parents because of HIV/AIDS – it’s not easy at all. Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do about that. We just need to take care of the orphans who lost their parents due to HIV/AIDS, and of course let’s not forget to educate the nation on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

As a result of people dying of HIV/AIDS, leaving their innocent children behind, there will be no one to take care of them. These children might drop out of school, become criminals, start sleeping around with sugar daddies/mommies to get money or end up being pregnant and infected

with the pandemic disease. These are things that are happening around us, in communities, and we are doing nothing about this.

I urge the government to take care of orphans and street kids to make sure that they are protected and safe. It is their responsibility as the Government of Namibia to make sure that they are sleeping under a roof, that they all go to school, and that they get food on their table every day. It's the government's duty to make sure these kids are satisfied with their needs and happy indeed.

Despite all this, my message to the youth is just for them to be strong and follow their dreams. We all can do it! We are the future leaders of tomorrow! Let's keep that in mind, and let's not forget that, with our Almighty God, nothing is impossible – everything is possible! Together, we as the youth, we can do it!

Chapter 4

**“Who takes care of me?
Growing up in times of AIDS”**

Interviews with School Teachers and Principal

Excerpts from an interview with Ms Elma Mazeingo and Ms Bertha Amushila, teachers at Havana Primary School (Katutura, Windhoek, September 2012)



“Parents are going out to work, and then the children are left alone at home”

“Havana Primary School has 1 435 learners and had two shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. But the afternoon group was a bit of a problem because most of the parents are going out to work and then the children are left alone at home. So, when those children are coming to school, sometimes you will find that some of them are a bit dirty because they forgot. They play, play, play, and they forget that they have to come to school.

“They put on their school uniform and come, and then they are also tired and nobody is really taking care of them because the parents have gone to work.

“Okay, so we found it a bit challenging. However, our government or our Ministry answered our request and they gave us some tents. Eight tents were set up as classrooms next to the counsellor’s office there, so now the afternoon shift has been abolished. All the learners come in the morning now. It is only that they are coming to different places: some are here and some are at the tents. The school makes provision for those who are at the tents to also get the meals, and so there are other ladies who volunteer to cook for these children at the tents.”

“Here you have to go and buy everything from the shop”

“Martha, she is an orphan. She doesn’t have a mother nor father, right, but an aunt is taking care of her. So, it depends. But really, when it comes to finance, it’s a problem if a parent is unemployed and cannot get a salary every month to take care of extra children. It’s a burden on their shoulders.

That parent will preferably send the child to the North to be taken care of by the granny because grandparents are working in the field there with the extended family, producing some food from their field. And here, unlike there, you have to go and buy everything from the shop. So it will be easier if the child stays there.

“The problem is only a financial one. Yes, and mostly the parents send their children to the North to be taken care of by the grandparents who are old now. There is no one to take care of them here most of the time. [...]

“The grandparents are also getting grants from the government – the pension. They are getting some money. At least they are having something, a monthly income. Unlike here, when you are unemployed.”

“The school feeding programme is helping a lot”

“I am just so lucky that I am at a school where there is a feeding program because, really, we found out that it is helping a lot. Our children, some of them are coming with a hungry stomach and they cannot concentrate. You can see that the child did not eat that morning, or he or she will tell you that she did not even have anything to eat the previous night. And then, at least during the break, that child will be able to have a plate with porridge, which will make a difference for the day, and it also helps to encourage more learners to come because they know that at school they will have something to eat.”

“It only depends on the situation and support at home”

“You will find a child who is not an orphan, but the kind of treatment he receives at home can affect him psychologically so that that child cannot concentrate in class. While an orphan that is being taken care of by a guardian who is responsible, that child will not feel like an orphan. So, it only depends on the situation and support at home.”

“If you are not infected, then you are affected”

“HIV has been discussed openly. Children grow up hearing that this virus, it can affect anybody. It doesn't discriminate. Whether it's a male, female, rich, poor, everybody can be affected. So, what is the use of discriminating against the person who is HIV-positive? That person can just live a normal life like the other person. So, with that understanding, they are starting to realise that, whether you are affected or not, you can live a happy life.

“And I think most people are directly or indirectly affected. If you are not infected, then you are affected. And what I really like about our parents is that they are open about it. They will even come to the school and they will sometimes even inform the teacher about the learner's status. Yes, they do that. Yes, they do. The stigma will be there, but not as it was those years ago. It will be there.

“The society we live in, there are many evil people there and maybe ... but it's coming down. A lot of people understand that, if you are not infected, then you will be affected. [...] Mostly the parents make sure that they [the children] take their tablets before they come to school. Yes. And the good thing is that some of the learners are so free to just come and trust a teacher and share his/her status with the teacher and, through that, the child is also getting support because at least you encourage that child, and you can also remind the child to take his or her medicine.

“So, because some of the children have cell phones, you just text the child, you know, because you created that bond, that openness between you and the child, especially when it comes to his status: ‘Hi, have you taken your medicine today?’ ‘Yes madam, I did.’ You know, it helps the child to be happy because there is somebody that really cares, somebody from outside, rather than my parents and everybody at home. You know, it puts a smile on that child’s face every day and it helps to realise the importance of taking the medication.”

Excerpt from an interview with Mr Toivo Shilumbu, Principal of Shimbode Combined School in Epinga (Ondangwa, October 2012)



“That is the problem of our people”

“When we started in January, we had 365 learners and, due to the drop-outs, we are only having now 346 learners. [...] Some fell pregnant and some just dropped out because of disciplinary problems. They gave up. They don’t want to continue anymore, and that could be for some reasons we don’t know sometimes because, sometimes, if a learner drops out and you call the parents and the parents don’t come, it is very difficult for you to go where the learner lives. So, I think that from 365 to now 346, you can get the number of how many dropped out so far.”

And the number of teenage pregnancies is increasing?

“That one is a disaster! Even now, as we are speaking, we are having three learners taking an examination, but they are pregnant.”

Who made them pregnant?

“Boys from the village – the cattle herders. You know the problem there is ... that area is a ... I can say it is a poverty-stricken area. But now, there are people who are getting money – the cattle herders. Most of them are just being introduced to the people from Angola. Those who are looking after the cattle, they get paid, and so they use that money to trap our learners. And even

these people who are from Walvis Bay, Windhoek, they are having money, so they can easily manipulate our learners using that money. That's the problem.

“Most of the learners are from poor families, not originally from Epinga. Some of them are from other villages, but they are here because they are schooling here. And maybe the care is not enough in the house where they live. Many of them are in that situation. The learners do not come from other regions, they come from Ohangwena, but from far. I now remember there is one from Ohauwanga. I don't know why he came to Epinga because, you know, people ... most of the learners from other schools, they like our school. That's why we have learners from so many villages and some are from Ohauwanga here.

“So, they left their schools and they came to ours. But in the house where they are staying now, that is where the problems start sometimes. Maybe the food is not enough there. You know that learners have to bring their own food from where they came from. Maybe that's where the problem starts. Maybe they don't have enough food there, and then they need some money, and then these boys, they take that advantage. Because, if somebody is in need of money and you have that money, you can demand whatever you want: 'If you want me to give money, that is the condition.' That is the problem of our people.”

Epilog

“Traditionally, in the extended family ... if I died, my children would still say ‘mom’ to my sister. They would never be somebody without a mother and father. In the African culture, there was never something like an orphan. So now, this has been broken down – the extended family – when we talk in terms of HIV that came in. When I have four children and my sister suddenly dies, leaving five children, then I have nine children. I can’t support nine children. There is chaos in the home because there is no food. There’s no real care. We’ve been brought up not by material things – we have been brought up by love! You know, by respect! By care! Everybody who is a father is my father. Everybody who is a mother is my mother! That’s how we grew up, and that is what we have lost.”

Agnes Tom
Founder of Baby Haven – an orphanage in Katutura,
Windhoek, Namibia, April 2008

“I just think that nowadays we should actually talk about all children because we are realising that all children are becoming vulnerable in Namibia. There are many things such as gender-based violence, children are being abused, children are being raped, they are being beaten up by people who are supposed to take care of them. So, today in Namibia, I can say, every child is vulnerable.”

Amelia Senda Musukubili
Control Social Worker – Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare,
Windhoek, Namibia, September 2012

Destruction of social relationships, the ever-growing gap between the rich and the poor and the spread of HIV/AIDS – Namibia, the country in Southern Africa that became independent in 1990, has to fight many problems.

The country shows an overall HIV prevalence of 18.8% among women attending ANC clinics. That number masks regional variations: Caprivi has the highest prevalence rate (35.6%), followed by Oshana (25.1%), Oshikoto (24.2%), and Omusati (22%), while Hardap has the lowest (10.2%).⁶ One of the consequences of this is the dramatically high number of orphans living in the country. Namibia is also reported to be one of the countries with the highest rate of suicides worldwide, which can certainly be traced back to the epidemic and its consequences. In addition, there is a growing social problem of domestic violence against women and children.

The raising of children in Namibia is not specifically the responsibility of the biological parents, but embedded into the concept of the extended family. A Namibian orphan can be well integrated into an extended family. Many women can be a mother to a child, for the term *meme* (mother) does not solely apply to the biological mother but also and especially to all her sisters. Everyone who is there, who has some time to spare and watch the child, becomes responsible. With the rise of the current crisis, however, the extended family is being damaged and becomes weaker.

⁶ Building local capacity for delivery of HIV services in Southern Africa Project. BLC and Nanaso Mapping and Capacity Assessment of HIV and AIDS Civil Society Organisations in Namibia. March 2013, p. 27

It can be assumed that orphans have a particularly high risk of becoming victims of neglect and abuse.

This is linked to the dramatic social changes in the country. Until now, most orphans have been accommodated in their extended families. However, due to the high number of infected, dead and orphaned people, the current familial structures are clearly reaching their resilience limits.

Moreover, the familial structures and contexts are being unbalanced by modernisation processes, such as labor migration, migration into cities and urbanisation. The socially devastating effects caused by HIV/AIDS and “modernised poverty”⁷ are obvious. Nevertheless, the way Namibians deal with the AIDS orphan crisis still shows that there is some kind of social wealth left that is based on the power of the family, neighborhood and subsistence.

Given the fact that the majority of all Namibian children do not live with their both biological parents (Namibia Demographic Health Survey 2006-07), which is a normal practice in Namibia and other surrounding countries, it would be difficult to compare the living arrangements of orphans with non-orphans. Even if orphans need special support, many children in Namibia who still have their biological parents can suffer of insufficient care as well.

Malnutrition is responsible for the death of at least 6 000 children annually (*The Namibian* 10.05.2011). Nonetheless, it can be assumed that it is an important factor that millions of children in Southern Africa lost one or both parents. Therefore, many children grow up under exceptional circumstances. The orphan crisis, which is particularly a consequence of the AIDS epidemic, is leading to specific kinds of disadvantages for these children, such as discrimination and a higher risk of malnutrition.

Namibia: The Orphan-Crisis in Numbers

According to the *Namibia 2011 Population and Housing Census Basic Report* (published in 2012), 2.7% of all children under 18 years old are complete orphans, whilst 13% of all children are half-orphans. Countrywide, there were 2 953 orphan-headed households and more than 7 600 child-headed households. Most orphans live in the rural regions in the north of Namibia.

In the Ohangwena, Omusati and Oshana regions, 17% of all children are complete or half-orphans. There are 14% of all children in rural areas that are half-orphans, compared with 11% in urban areas, and 3% of children in rural areas are complete orphans, compared with 2% in urban areas.

Looking at the comparatively low percentage of complete orphans (2.7% on average), it must be noticed that fathers only play a marginal role in the care of the children. Hence, a child who lost the mother rather than the father can be considered as a complete orphan.⁸

⁷ The philosopher Ivan Illich defined “modernised poverty” as the lack of power over circumstances combined with a loss of personal potency. Illich said that modern poverty is created by the increasing reliance on institutional care, such as health care, education or development aid, and on consumption of modern goods. This adds a new dimension to the helplessness of the poor, and it creates a psychological impotence and the inability to fend for oneself. People cease to be able to govern themselves, and they demand to be managed. See Ivan Illich's: *Deschooling Society*. London/ NY: Boyars 2004

⁸ Orphan figures highest in northern regions, Namibian Sun, 02.04.2013

⁹ National Plan of Action 2006-2010 for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Namibia, Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Windhoek 2007

According to estimates, 250 000 orphans and other vulnerable children live in the country, in relation to a total population of 2.1 million.⁹

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare wants to extend the definition of vulnerability¹⁰ for the reason to reach more children with support.¹¹

¹⁰ The National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children defines an orphan “as a child who has lost one or both parents because of death and is under the age of 18 years,” and a vulnerable child as “a child who needs care and protection” because of the following reasons:

- a child is living with a chronically ill caregiver, defined as a caregiver who was too ill to carry out daily chores during 3 of the last 12 months
- a child is living with a caregiver with a disability who is not able to complete household chores
- a child is of school-going age and is unable to attend a regular school due to disability
- a child is living in a household headed by an elderly caregiver (60 years or older, with no caregiver in the household between 18 and 59 years of age)
- a child is living in a poor household, defined as a household that spends over 60% of total household income on food
- a child is living in a child-headed household (meaning a household headed by a child under the age of 18)
- a child has experienced a death of an adult caregiver (18-59 years) in the household during the last 12 months.

¹¹ Interview with Joyce Nakuta, Deputy Director: Child Care Services, Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Windhoek, 12.09.2012

Who Takes Care? Children of Crisis is an eye-opening collection of very personal short essays by Namibian learners on their caregivers and growing up in times of AIDS.

It proves how alert, lively and clever these children are. The stories show the wisdom and maturity of young people whose everyday lives are mostly made of crises and catastrophes, with HIV and AIDS, as well as food security, playing a major role in this regard.

The collection is meant as a contribution of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) to the discourse on their wellbeing. It is addressed to schools, professionals, researchers and to anyone who is interested in the deeper understanding of childhood in an African country like Namibia that has to deal with the challenge of a high number of orphans and vulnerable children on a daily basis.



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