

Updates & information on  
psychosocial support



Children at a site supported by REPSSI partner Red Cross Lesotho © REPSSI/ Willem De Lange

## A Decade of Psychosocial Support

### Ten years of change and transformation

Just over ten years ago, a concerned group of practitioners, children, youth, partners, managers, and academics came together in Zimbabwe. They represented organisations responding to the crisis of orphaned and vulnerable children in the region due to HIV and AIDS, and they met to discuss the social and emotional needs of these children, and how best to address them.

Supported by a trio of funding partners (the Swiss agency for Development and Cooperation, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development) this group established the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative.

A decade later, REPSSI has developed, tested and published a range of manuals and tools on psychosocial support, become an official partner to SADC, and assisted NGOs and governments across the region to improve their services for over five million children collectively.

In this issue we look at the successes of our partners in using psychosocial to bring about transformation and change, illustrating the results of that meeting ten years ago. You can also read about our plans for celebrating a decade of joint work for the wellbeing of children.

- Noreen M. Huni  
REPSSI Executive Director

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**Akbar na:r min asgar  
shara:r**

- Libyan saying ("Great fires erupt  
from tiny sparks")

## REPSSI@10 Celebrations



*Children featured in the short REPSSI video, available on the front page of the website [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org)*

*To celebrate ten years working together for the wellbeing of children, we will be holding events throughout the region and beyond.*

### Events

To the right is a listing of all the in-country events to be held across East and Southern Africa. REPSSI will also be holding a reception before the International AIDS Conference in Washington, to celebrate with our international partners.

### Publication

A special publication will be released in June, collecting together stories from our partners across the region. If you would like to be sent an electronic copy when it is launched, simply email [communications@repssi.org](mailto:communications@repssi.org).

### Website

A special section has been developed on the REPSSI website, where testimonies and reflections from our partners, founders and Board will be posted over the coming months.

Activity	Date
Regional	
Reception at International	21 July
<b>South Sub-Region</b>	
South Africa	11 October
Swaziland	23 August
Lesotho	27 September
<b>Central Sub-Region</b>	
Zimbabwe	26 October
Mozambique	16 June
Botswana	27 July
Angola	28 September
<b>East Sub-Region</b>	
Tanzania	30/ 31 August
Kenya	17 August
Uganda	25 May
<b>North Sub-Region</b>	
Zambia	30 August
Malawi	16 June
Namibia	To be Confirmed

## Attitudes to Death, Inheritance & Adoption



“Before we did not treat orphaned children in the community well. But after the *Journey of Life* and other training, that cruel behaviour has been reduced. We know now that an orphaned child is a child like any other.”

- Community leader, Malawi

Children at an early Childhood Development Centre with CONSOL Homes, Malawi © REPSSI

*Traditionally, many practices surrounding death can overlook children and their rights. Psychosocial support activities can help communities see the affect on children, and change their behaviour.*

### Speaking about Death

In many communities across the region, children are not involved in the death of their parents. They are not brought to the funeral, nor are they even told that the parent is dead. “In the past we were hiding the death,” explains a caregiver with **ZAMWASO**. “When a parent passed away we told the child they were away travelling.”

However, when encouraged to think about issues from the child’s perspective, our partners report that communities realise children need the opportunity to grieve, and begin to change their approach. “Now, children take part in the process and that is a remarkable change,” says Association Vute, an affiliate with our partner **Save the Children** in Mozambique.

### Inheritance Rights

Despite laws protecting children’s inheritance, relatives of the dead parent often appropriate land or possessions belonging to the child.

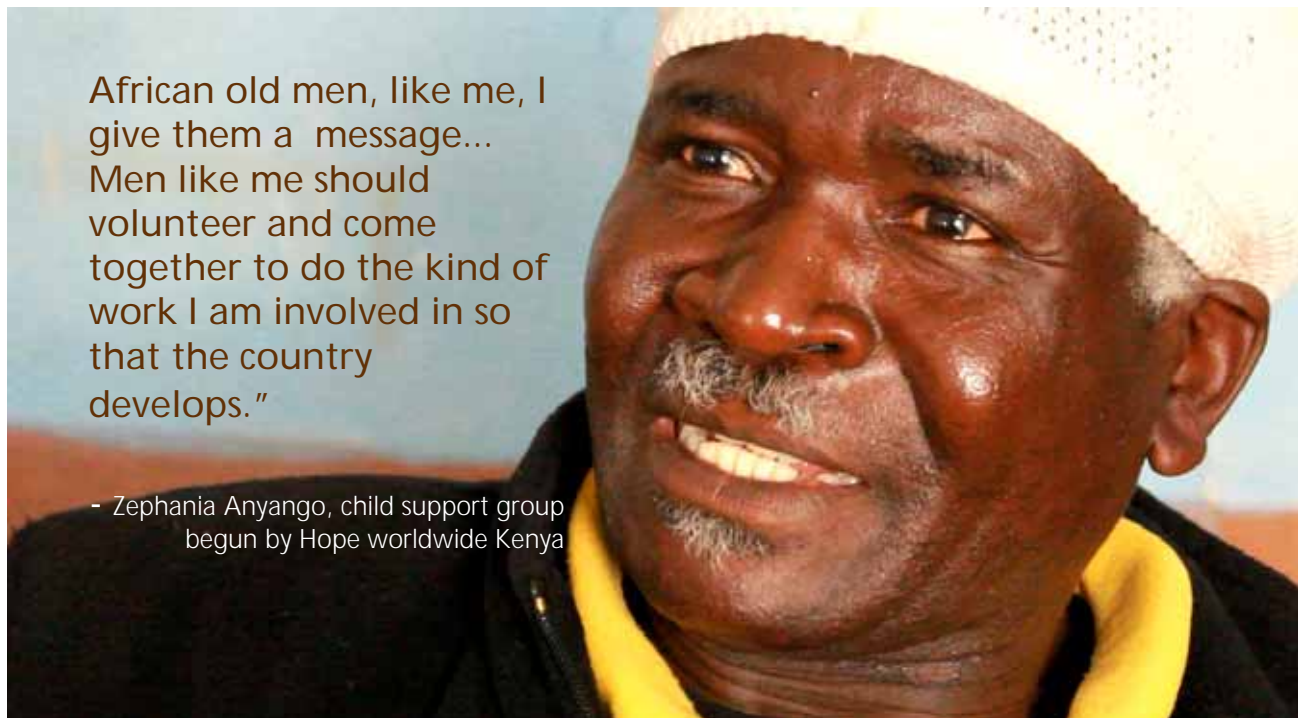
Our partners have related many cases of how this practise is being reversed. In Zimbabwe, a grandmother in **MASO’s** support group explained to us that she had taken property from orphaned children. The discussion in the *Journey of Life* had reduced her to tears when she understood how her behaviour had affected her nieces and nephews. “It helped me to realise that if anyone dies in the family, the property must be used for the good of the children,” she said.

### Treatment of Orphaned Children

Children can also be treated badly when adopted by another family after the death of their parents. This discrimination can take many forms, such as being forced to eat separately, given fewer clothes and possessions, or just being made to feel unloved.

Thankfully, behaviour like this can be changed through careful awareness-raising activities, as partners from across the region attest. A traditional leader in Malawi told us this following training from **CONSOL Homes**. “Before we did not treat orphaned children in the community well,” he said. “But after the *Journey of Life* and other training, that cruel behaviour has been reduced. We know now that an orphaned child is a child like any other.”

## Changing Childcare Gender Roles



African old men, like me, I give them a message... Men like me should volunteer and come together to do the kind of work I am involved in so that the country develops."

- Zephania Anyango, child support group begun by Hope worldwide Kenya

Photo © REPSSI

Childcare in Africa is still predominantly seen as a woman's role, and as a result is often undervalued. However, the awareness-raising and personal reflection that psychosocial support activities promote often help challenge these gender roles, and encourage men to become more concerned about the vulnerable children in their communities.

### Kenya

Zephania Anyango is the only male member of his support group in the slum area of Nairobi, Kenya. Wearing a knitted cap and a permanent smile, he encourages other men to follow his example.

"African old men, like me, I give them a message," he says. "Men like me should volunteer and come together to do the kind of work I am involved in so that the country develops."

His group runs income-generating activities to support vulnerable children, and holds kid's clubs at the weekend. They found their direction through a *Journey of Life* workshop, and have also received other psychosocial support training.

When asked what inspires them to be involved in this work, he replies "Love... it begins from the home and moves outside. The love spreads to everyone. It's this love that makes us do the work."

### Tanzania

In the Kimandolu district of Arusha, Tanzania, Mohamed Nyasuka is a member of the Most Vulnerable Children's Committee. These committees were set up by St. Lucia Hospice and Orphanage in cooperation with the local government, following REPSSI training. Their role is to identify and assist vulnerable children in their area.

When he went on home visits as a committee member, and saw the situation of vulnerable children in their home, he realised that he really did need to provide this support.

"Other men have tried to discourage me," he told us. "But this is my vision. I love children. When I was selected and trained by St. Lucia it was my dream coming true. This is from my heart."

## Increasing Child Participation

*Children's voices are not always solicited, or listened to, in families or communities. Many parents, staff members, community caregivers and traditional leaders we have spoken to have told us that the psychosocial support training from our partners has helped them to listen to children and include them in decision-making.*

Agnes, the director of Fanang Diatla, an organisation supported by REPSSI's partner, **the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund**, explained the shift that had occurred in her area and organisation: "It is not our culture to consult children, to consult teenagers, we do things and the child is left behind... It is something that was lacking, but psychosocial support has opened our eyes that a child's suggestion is very important."

In Zimbabwe, a **Midlands AIDS Support Organisation (MASO)** support group member explained a very similar shift that occurred after participating in *Journey of Life* activities.

"Before, there is this feeling that children were not to participate in decisions at home," she said. "After being trained on listening to children, talking to children, there was a big change from what we traditionally used to do."

In Tanzania, caregivers in groups established by the **Zanzibar Muslim Women's AIDS Support Organization (ZAMWASO)** say they now listen to children at a younger age, and have moved to ensuring the greater participation of children.

One caregiver, Moskes Omar, explained the changes she had witnessed. "Before *Journey of Life* training we were way behind. When children came with questions we were not in a position to receive, give answers or information but only being harsh. We could not understand them."

The training helped parents to listen, and see about things from the child's perspective. "We have noticed positive changes in the children. They can now approach us and we can have a discussion. We can now exchange and share ideas."

Francisco Canivete, the director of a REPSSI partner in Angola, **Association Elavoko Lyomala**, has noticed similar changes after training in psychosocial support by REPSSI: "I have seen that as a result of workers being trained on psychosocial support, children are now happy and both children and the workers know how to interact with each other. Attitudes and behaviour are transformed and children are now feeling at easy to communicate and interact."

"When children came with questions we were not in a position to receive, give answers or information but only being harsh... [now] we have noticed positive changes in the children. They can now approach us and we have a discussion."

- Moskes Omar, Caregiver, Zanzibar

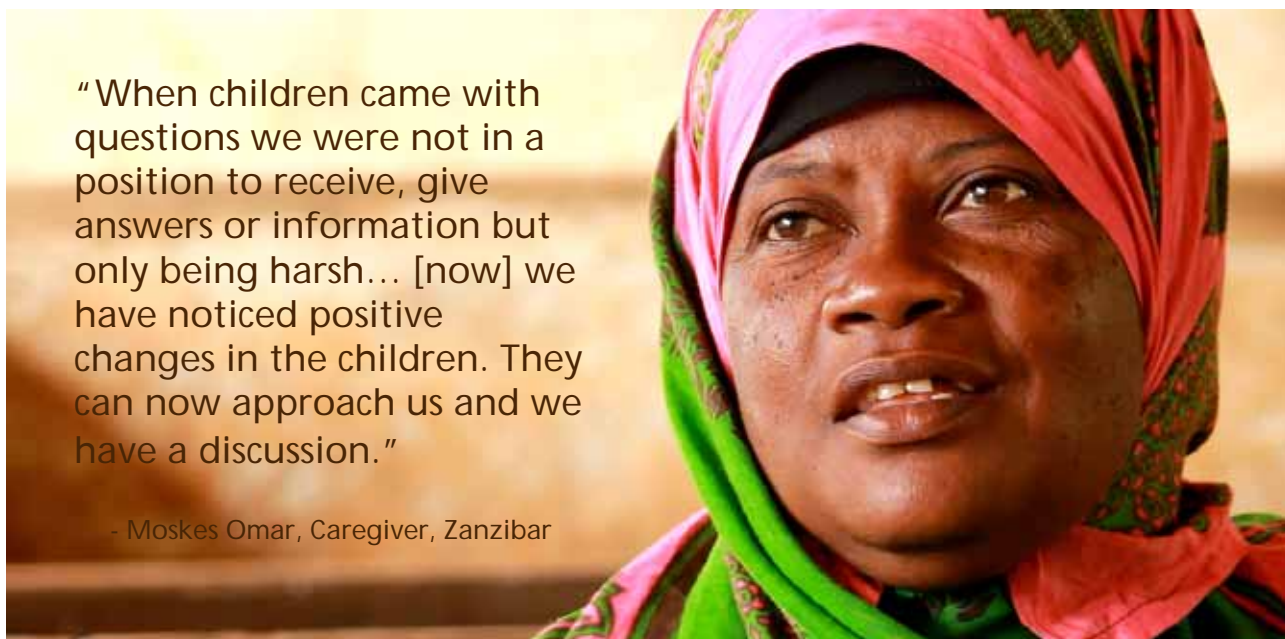


Photo © REPSSI

## Government Focus: Interview with Jeanne Ndyetambura (Tanzania)



“Children who have thought they can never make it in life, they are starting to dream again.”

Photo © REPSSI

Jeanne Ndyetambura is the Assistant Commissioner for Social Welfare, Government of Tanzania. Her Ministry’s mandate is to address issues concerning all vulnerable groups.

“We thought about the vulnerable groups and what they need, and psychosocial support was found to be one of the primary services that was necessary to adopt,” says Jeanne.

“We went into partnership with REPSSI and ever since we have been working with REPSSI in terms of capacity development of the government, to be able to mainstream psychosocial support in our services.”

The government in the process of developing national guidelines for psychosocial care and support, and with REPSSI’s assistance has conducted trainings for staff at the national level, and for caregivers at community level.

“In most cases,” Jeanne explains, “the kind of caregivers we are dealing with is largely very elderly caregivers who are caring for orphans, grandchildren, or even, children who are taking care of other children... So you see these are the two categories of care givers who are very vulnerable because they lack care parenting skills.”

In Tanzania, 53% of all vulnerable children are cared for by very elderly grandparents, and 12% are cared for by their siblings. The government’s programmes work with children through children’s clubs where they address emotional issues affecting them, and provide them with coping strategies and advice.

“We have been getting feedback that it is really making an impact,” concludes Jeanne proudly. “Children who have thought they can never make it in life, they are starting to dream again.”



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## Who will Love my children?

### Capacity building for orphanage caregivers in Cameroon

By Sipilele Kaseke, Regional Training Officer

Often one can hear children in orphanages sing and dance, but these uplifting songs hide a sad reality—increased vulnerability of children.

Not all children in the orphanages are orphans. Many have parents or caregivers, but they are left at the orphanages out of desperation, or with the hope that their children will get a ‘better’ life. A ‘better’ life in this case means food, accommodation and shelter. Issues of love, identity, care, protection, and affection are not the main drivers for bringing children to orphanages.

Although orphanages are not the best place for a child to grow up, they can play a role in providing alternative care for children. Caregivers working in orphanages are doing the best they know, to love, protect and support the children. Challenges they face include constantly increasing numbers of children, a lack of ability to manage different children’s behaviours, and a lack of support and involvement from community members.

The trainings that REPSSI has been conducting in Cameroon, with the support of **Centro per la Salute del Bambino**, have focused on strengthening the capacity of institutions, families and communities, care for children; mobilize support; and increase child participation as well as child to child support.

The lessons learnt from this experience are summarised in the box opposite. Find more information about our tools and training. Contact [training@repssi.org](mailto:training@repssi.org) or visit [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org).

## Lessons learned...

... through our interactions with caregivers from the orphanage and representatives from the Cameroon Department of Social Affairs include:

- Many orphanages were started out of love by concerned citizens. However, it is clear that their lack of capacity to run and manage institutions affects not only the sustainability of these institutions, but also the well-being of the caregivers. Therefore, **capacity building should be holistic and involve other technical service providers.**
- There is a need to strengthen the social service workforce, so they can monitor programs, provide mentorship support, and affect real change in cultures and practices within the institutions. Therefore, **capacity building for implementing organisations should include the government.**
- Strengthening families and communities needs to be a priority for government and supporting organisations. Interventions such as unconditional cash transfers to families, succession planning, and community conversations can help protect children.

If institutional care is to be recognised as a part of the social protection sphere, there is a need to ensure that institutions operate in line with the *Principles of Alternative Care* as outlined by the United Nations Human Rights Council.

## Certificate Graduate: Sergeant Zama Mahlalela



“We learned that children need to participate, they need to be part of reaching a consensus. Children are not just to be seen, they are to be heard also.”

Sergeant Zama spent five years working in communities across Swaziland with the Domestic Violence Unit of the Royal Swaziland Police Force. This is a sensitive and complex role for police officers to perform, and one which she says innovative new distance-learning Certificate has helped her greatly with – especially as she is now responsible for guiding all new recruits to the force in how to behave in this area.

Last year, as a result of her graduation from the *Certificate Course in Community-based Work with Children and Youth*, developed by REPSSI and UNICEF, she was promoted to a position at the Police Training College. She is now a trainer on domestic violence issues, passing on her knowledge about child protection and sexual offences to 200 recruits a year.

“These [new recruits] are going to be transferred to different communities, they are going to be hands on in the job, they should know how to handle children,” she explains. “The Certificate really empowered me to share what I learned and transfer it to others.”

The Certificate is a course developed specifically to provide people like Zama—who are working directly with children—with the skills to protect and empower children through their work.

“I enjoyed finding new skills,” she smiles. “We learned about human rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and about the best interests of the child. We also learned that children need to participate... they need to be part of reaching a consensus... children are not just to be seen, they are to be heard also.”

As a result of the course, Sergeant Zama now ensures that children are consulted in any policing decisions made about their welfare. The course also helped her to handle cases of domestic violence. “[Victims] need support more than anything, they need psychosocial support,” she remarks. “As a police officer, you have to identify their support system in the community, so they don’t become a victim again. You need to find avenues to help, to empower them... so they can regain their trust.”

“As police officers we deal with the community, and children they are part of the community,” she concludes. “I would recommend that other law enforcement agencies take up this course.”

***The Certificate Course in Community-based Work with Children and Youth is accredited by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and delivered in Swaziland through the University of Swaziland. The third intake will begin in July, in 11 countries in East and Southern Africa. To learn more, contact [info@repssi.org](mailto:info@repssi.org).***



## 959 new Graduates for the Wellbeing of Children

Just under a thousand new graduates across nine countries celebrated their new qualification in the *Certificate in Community Based Work with Children and Youth* during March and April.

Though no two graduations were quite the same, they were all joyous. In Lesotho the students sang, “we have long been waiting for this day to come”. Graduations were also graced by many dignitaries: the Deputy Prime Minister of Swaziland, the Minister of Gender, Children and Community Development of Malawi, and the Permanent Secretaries of Gender, Children and Social Development in Kenya and of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe.

Graduations marked the completion of 18 months of intense study in psychosocial care, protection and

support for 959 graduates who are drawn from the ranks of community caregivers, faith groups, teachers, police officers, voluntary children’s officers, child protection assistants and others working with children and youth at community level. The course is delivered through the innovative situated, supported distance learning method. Nsamizi Training Institute of Social Development in Uganda describes this delivery mechanism as “Taking the Institute to the people”.

The numbers of graduates in each country were:

Kenya	104	Swaziland	119
Lesotho	106	Tanzania	106
Malawi	111	Uganda	129
Mozambique	8	Zambia	114
Namibia	42	Zimbabwe	120



*Certificate graduates from Zambia, at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation Photo © REPSSI*

## Our gratitude to the African Centre for Childhood

The **African Centre for Childhood** played a central role in the design and development of the Situated, Supported Distance learning delivery model that sets the *Certificate in Community Based Work with Children and Youth* apart from so many other training programmes. The ACC also was pivotal to the administrative and logistical management for the delivery of the course in eight countries in the first cycle and ten countries in the second.

To date, 1454 students have successfully graduated. In the second cycle, five national academic institutions effectively delivered the course.

REPSSI acknowledges with deep appreciation the critical role that the ACC management and team played in the early stages of delivering the certificate and the success that has been achieved.

In the third cycle the ACC has transferred all the delivery responsibilities to REPSSI and the UKZN. REPSSI has employed Maria Makgamathe and Annalee Hough who previously worked on the certificate delivery with the ACC. They are based within the UKZN from where they continue to support the delivery. The third cycle is beginning in September. For more information please contact [info@repssi.org](mailto:info@repssi.org).

## Resource Page: Tools & Training for Change

REPSSI has a range of materials and trainings that are useful for changing attitudes and practises. We have also recently accredited two new tools in cooperation with our partners. Read more below.

As a leader in psychosocial support, REPSSI is often approached by individuals and organisations to endorse or improve their own psychosocial material. To this end, 2012 has seen REPSSI engage in the endorsement of two publications both of which augment REPSSI's repertoire of tools and approaches.

### *Say and Play (with Population Council International)*

*Say and Play* is an interactive tool designed for orphans and vulnerable children from three to six years old and those who care for them. It uses pictures, stories and games to help children speak about their lives and, through these activities, and it guides adults to identify and support the emotional and social needs of children.



### *You Are A Great Child: What's Great About You (with Janet Bauer)*

REPSSI is in the process of reviewing *What's Great About You*® originally developed by Janet Bauer. This process will soon lead to REPSSI's endorsement of the programme, which is designed to empower children ages 7-18. REPSSI is particularly interested in *What's Great About You* as a school-based programme which can help children understand that they have many positive qualities, and that they are unique and wonderful. It will be introduced to teachers via REPSSI's situated, supported, distance learning Teacher Certificate Course.

### **Other REPSSI Tools**

Find more information about our tools and training. Contact [training@repssi.org](mailto:training@repssi.org) or visit [www.repssi.org](http://www.repssi.org).

### **Certificate Course**

You can learn more about the Certificate Course mentioned on pages 8, 9 and 11 by contacting [info@repssi.org](mailto:info@repssi.org) website. A short video is also available to view on our website.

## Upcoming Training

REPSSI will be holding a training for **Regional Resource People in Psychosocial Support Concepts & Approaches**, in Arusha, Tanzania, from 17 to 28 September.

Understanding children's behaviours, supporting grieving children and working effectively with families and communities are amongst some of the challenges faced by many organisations today. The ability to program in the context of HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict still remains a challenge.

REPSSI is offering a workshop that will develop your skills in child and youth programming, with emphasis on social and emotional well-being.

The workshop will explore psychosocial support concepts, models and approaches and also enhance your training and programming skills in this field.

Join us from the **17<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2012** for a fun time of learning and sharing! You can contact [training@repssi.org](mailto:training@repssi.org) for more information on training solutions for your organisation.





Students in the Nairobi area, Kenya, gather for their three-weekly supervised session with their Mentor © REPSSI

## Research: REPSSI's Distance Learning Course

By Lisa Langhaug, REPSSI Head of Research

REPSSI has been busy collecting data from our alumni of the *Certificate Course on Community Based Work with Children and Youth*.

First, we reached 64% (309) of the graduates from the first Certificate cycle (2009) by phone, and asked them to complete a short questionnaire. Then, we collected similar data from the students who have just graduated from the second cycle of the Certificate. Some of the questions we asked them were the same as those for alumni from cycle 1, but we also asked them about their direct work with children. As the completion rate was lower than expected (67.3% completed the evaluation form, and 42.5% reported on direct work with children), we will continue to collect data from this group.

What did we find? Firstly, we found that our alumni attribute **changes they are making in their communities** to the learning they obtained on the Certificate.

We also found that many of our graduates **remain in their communities**. 18 months after graduation, 70% of the alumni reported they had not moved from their communities, indicating the strength of a situated, supported distance learning programme.

Data from our questionnaires also confirmed that we are reaching the right kinds of people with this

course: **those who work directly with children**. Using data collected from our recent graduates, we can estimate that each of them is working with approximately 130 children (which translates to 113,400 children across ten countries), 7 of whom are living in child headed households (translating to 5,700 across ten countries). In addition, on average, our graduates are working with 19 caregivers (who each are caring for even more children).

Equally important, data from our graduates suggests that the certificate course has helped those who were in **volunteer positions to move into paid ones**. 18 months after graduating, 23% of those who started the course as volunteers are now in paid positions, 74% of whom think that this change is as a result of their being on the course. Even immediately after graduation, 9% of those that were volunteers are now being paid. Of those already in paid positions, 23.4% report being promoted.

Graduates also report feeling **more respected within their organizations**. More than two-thirds (70%) report being asked to lead a psychosocial support initiative in their organization, and 40% report being asked to lead trainings that include psychosocial support.

REPSSI will continue to collect data from the graduates of the Certificate, and share the results.

## News: Child Protection on the Agenda

The Dakar Child Protection Systems Strengthening conference brought together 350 delegates from 36 countries to share experiences and chart a way forward for sub-Saharan Africa. A call was made for the region to be part of the global shift towards systems strengthening, through investment in innovative national child protection systems that are scalable and measurable.

This requires strengthened partnerships across national social service sectors, civil society, academic and research institutions, international cooperating partners and communities. Partnerships should further strengthen linkages between formal, non formal and informal child protection systems.

REPSSI is contributing to the child protection systems strengthening in the region by developing capacities of community and social service sector caregivers through the Certificate programme. Psychosocial support is an integral component of child protection, and REPSSI advocates holistic care and support of children and youth within national level policies and frameworks in sectors such as health, education, social development and legal services.

## Dates for your Diary:

- **June 16:** Day of the African Child; REPSSI@10 celebrations in Malawi and Mozambique
- **July 22-27:** XIX International AIDS Conference, Washington DC, USA. The leading gathering for those working in the field of HIV, featuring new scientific developments knowledge and opportunities discussion of the major issues facing the global response to HIV.
- **July 27:** REPSSI@10 celebrations in Botswana
- **August 12:** International Youth Day
- **August 23:** REPSSI@10 celebrations in Swaziland

## News: Geneva Dialogue



Representatives from funding organisations, research institutes and non-governmental organisations gathered together in Geneva last month for a lively discussion on psychosocial support.

“There needs to be a critical mass of people who believe in emotional and social support for children,” said REPSSI Executive Director Noreen M. Huni, speaking at the event. “We cannot afford to know the cost of doing nothing.”

Convened by the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, other speakers were from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Swiss Academy for Development and SOS Children’s Villages. A [summary of the discussions and recommendations](#) is available on the NFSD website.

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