

Updates & information on
psychosocial support

The Hope Issue

At REPSSI, it is our privilege to work with a range of outstanding organisations across the region. Whether they are well-known international NGOs, or small, community-driven initiatives, our partners are all concerned with the wellbeing of vulnerable children and youth.

Next year, REPSSI will turn ten years old. Throughout this decade, we have been inspired by the successes of our partners in improving the social and emotional wellbeing of the people they work with. Despite distressing circumstances, poverty, legacies of conflict, and the devastation of HIV and AIDS, ordinary men, women, boys and girls across Africa are being supported and empowered to help one another live with hope and dignity. We are proud to have been part of that work.

In these pages, we are profiling stories of change, inspiration and encouragement from our partners. These stories show us that change is possible, and that situations of despair can be transformed by hope.

Hope can be fostered through kids clubs and caregiver support groups, home visits to show care and attention, government programmes, and training members of the community who interact with children every day.

The theme of this issue is **hope**, and we dedicate it to our partners.

- The REPSSI Team

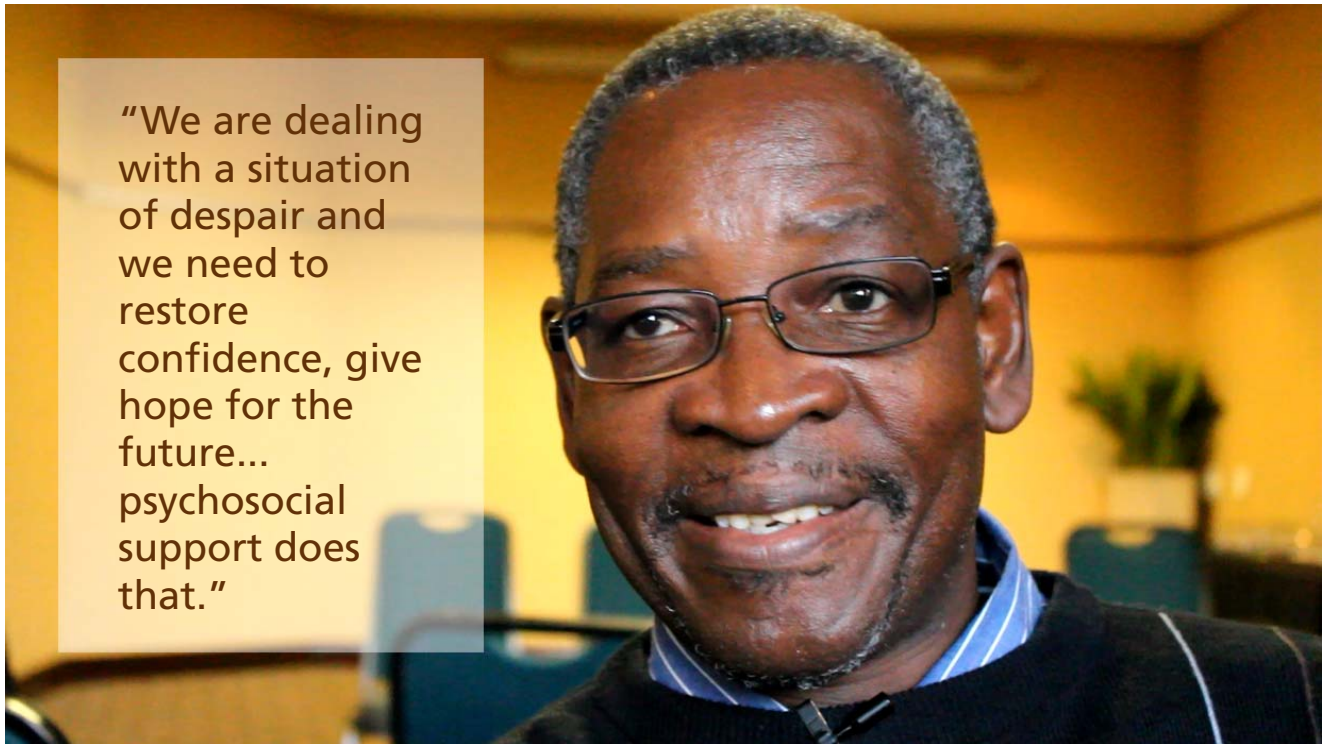
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*When the world says:
"Give up,"
Hope whispers,
"Try it one more time."*

~ Anonymous

Government Focus: Interview with Willard Manjolo (Malawi)



“We are dealing with a situation of despair and we need to restore confidence, give hope for the future... psychosocial support does that.”

In 2001, a study in Malawi found that “while children were being given material support, their emotional and psychological needs were being neglected.” The government responded with a national plan of action for orphans and other vulnerable children, which included psychosocial support as one of the main interventions.

“We started consultations with REPSSI,” **Willard Manjolo, Acting Director of Social Welfare Services for the Government of Malawi explains.** REPSSI assisted by providing guidance in developing policy, and training a pool of psychosocial support experts, known as ‘[Master Trainers](#)’. The government is now adapting REPSSI training manuals to local conditions.

“Since we started providing psychosocial support to orphans and vulnerable children, there’s been tremendous change in positive thinking, both for the children themselves, as well as the caregivers. Because we are dealing with a situation of despair ... What [psychosocial support] does, basically, is to restore confidence and hope for the future. You are

actually dialoguing with children, caregivers, communities, to realise that when you experience problems, it’s not the end of everything.”

“Instead of children wandering about, instead of caregivers not paying attention, that has changed, children realised the need to go to school, caregivers are providing that support and communities are coming together to support those children that experience, emotional and psychological problems.”

“I think this is a tremendous achievement because children now have a future, they see a future, with hope. I think that’s a major benefit we are seeing in Malawi.”

REPSSI partners with governments in 13 countries across East and Southern Africa. We have been working with the Southern African Development Community to develop a Minimum Package of Services for OVC&Y and a Psychosocial Support Conceptual Framework. These documents are being finalised and translated, and will be available soon.

Hope Costs Nothing

Often, the most valuable things cost nothing at all. This has been a revelation for our partners, and the communities they work with. Encouragement, love, trust, or a listening ear are things anyone can give, and which can make a real difference to those who receive it.

At organisational level

Peter Aduda, Kisumu Area Manager with [ChildFund Kenya](#), reflects on what his organisation has learned about psychosocial support. "The partnership arrangement which has grown over time between ChildFund and REPSSI has prepared the frontline staff and everybody else that is involved in the interventions to appreciate that other than the physical needs that we were looking at, there are certain things that are equally important to the growth and development of children... We realised that there are crucial things in people's lives that do not necessarily cost money... something like attention, something like love, something like care... it is an important thing as it adds a lot of perspective to the growth and development of children."

ChildFund Kenya has been changing its approach to take into account psychosocial as well as the physical or material needs, and reports that the communities and families they work with appreciate these changes. "PSS has transformed that attitude that 'we don't have money', and therefore there is nothing we can do," says Peter.

At community level

Nancy Chidzankufa is Director of Programmes with the **Malawi Girl Guides Association (MAGGA)**. Since graduating as a [Master Trainer](#) with REPSSI, she has used REPSSI tools such as the *Journey of Life* to add value to MAGGA's work.

"Psychosocial support has also had a lot of impact in the communities that we work with," she tells us. "The community has come to realise that ... they can provide the basic needs of a child, they can help a child to develop holistically without money. So with psychosocial support the community members are able to realise that they are able to take a very active role in helping develop the life of a child."

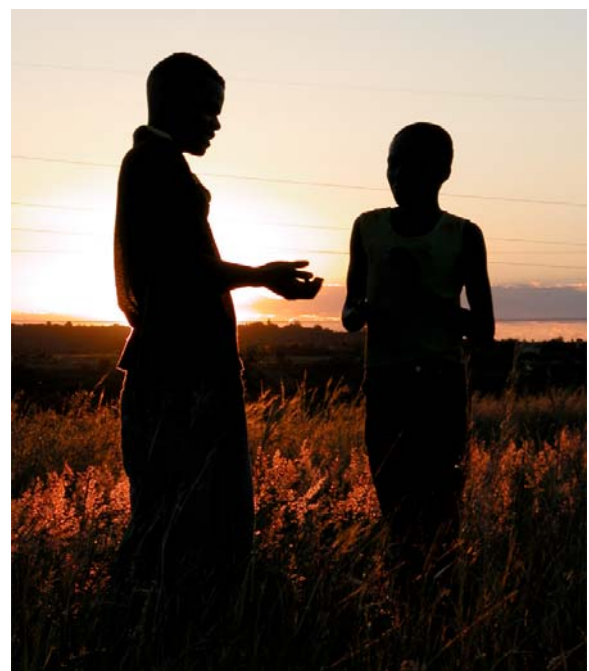
According to Kennedy Muriuki, Coordinator of Children's Programmes with [Hope worldwide](#)

"I used to think I was poor and believed that I could not give, but now I realise that I can give back in other ways that do not require money, by giving love and encouragement."

- Caregiver, Botswana

[Kenya](#), REPSSI tools have helped the communities he works with realise their own ability to provide crucial support to children. "What [the Journey of Life] showed the participants," he explains, "is that it is not only about the money, but even your ability to give your time to the children that is of value."

In Botswana, **Project Concern International** has found similar results when rolling out REPSSI's [Journey of Life workshops](#) in cooperation with the Government of Botswana. "I used to think I was poor and believed that I could not give, but now I realise that I can give back in other ways that do not require money, by giving love and encouragement," a caregiver said after the workshops.



REPSSI Tools:

A number of key REPSSI publications are mentioned throughout this newsletter. You can find more information about our publications and training by contacting info@repssi.org or training@repssi.org.

A list of all our publications and training manuals is also available on our website www.repssi.org.



With a Little Help From My Friends

Children, particularly those experiencing difficulties and feeling isolated, can find critical support and comfort from their peers. Three examples from South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe demonstrate the value of kids clubs in promoting hope and resilience.

In rural Limpopo, a small one-roomed building sits by a little-used dirt road. Chickens roam in the failing light, as the sun begins to set behind the ring of mountains. The infrequent cars that pass raise a cloud of dust which settles over everything.

In this unassuming place, at this time of day, the voices of teenagers are heard singing, laughing and talking.

The building houses a drop-in centre established by Far North Community Care and Development, supported by the [Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund](#), a REPSSI partner. A kids club is run weekly, for vulnerable children in the area to meet, discuss relevant issues, sing, dance and share problems.

The chair of the group, a 19-year-old bursting with energy, offers to share his story with the visitors. “When I first came to the group I was a street boy – living and working on the street. I was very ashamed and shy because I thought everyone knew my situation so I would be alone in the group and sit in the back so people would not see me. But through

“I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

-17-year old girl, member of youth group, South Africa

attendance I learnt to accept myself and build my confidence in opening up and accepting to be helped and guided. I now no longer live on the street.”

A shy girl beside him smiles, and tells us about the experience of losing her mother last year. “I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

Her friend adds: “People used to call me names – you have nothing, you are poor – but when I came to the group I was told that I had the ability to change my situation. They shared with us the game of “I am, I can, I have”, which excited me to start doing something about changing my journey of life. I don’t feel poor anymore.”

Many of our partners have mentioned that REPSSI’s training manual, *Facilitating Care and Support Through Kids Clubs*, is a successful tool in promoting peer support. You can learn more about it by emailing REPSSI at info@repssi.org.

(‘With a Little Help From My Friends’ contd.)

Kenya; Community brings peers together

Danso Dandora Community Support group began as a peer support group of HIV positive caregivers, based in the Dandora slum area of Nairobi. As a result of training through **Hope worldwide Kenya**, on the REPSSI tool *Journey of Life*, they also started a Kids Club to build the resilience of the children in their community.

“Now they can face the challenges in their life better”

The chairperson explained how the psychosocial support training led to the establishment of the Kids Club: “It was an eye-opener for me, on how to deal with the children, and the development of the child and their stages of growth. As a result we started a kids club... These children, some of them are HIV positive and some are not. So when we started the idea was we mingle them together.”

Every Saturday, the members of the kids club come together, to play games and learn life skills, and the group quickly saw the effects. “Within a short time, the children built resilience, they adapted, and now they can face the challenges in their life better.”

Zimbabwe: Children looking out for one other

In Zimbabwe, a teacher with **Midlands AIDS Services Organisation (MASO)** has set up a *Journey of Life* club for children at a local school.

The members tell us that through the activities in the club, they were taught to be observant, to work together as a group, and to look out for others in their school.

One member gave an example of seeing a child crying one day, saying “I was able to approach the child and find out what was wrong.” Another member told us how they noticed that a classmate had no shoes. They put up a notice asking for donations, and enlisted the help of a teacher to pass on the donated shoes anonymously.

Another member said that participating in the group allowed him to contribute opinions, solutions and ideas, and made him realize that the group felt his opinion mattered and he brought in a lot of value to the group. This changed his opinion of himself, increased his self worth and boosted his self esteem.



Three members of the Journey of Life club, set up under MASO, Zimbabwe



“I was afraid, I wanted to commit suicide but ... I now have self value, a lot to still achieve in life. I have hope and I am being encouraged by the members of the support group.”

-Member of a community group for widows and grandmothers

Members of a widows and grandmothers club, established by CONSOL Homes, Malawi

Peer Support for Adult Wellbeing

It is not only children who gain confidence, support and hope from their peers, as three examples from Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe illustrate.

CONSOL Homes, Malawi

A long-standing partner of REPSSI, [CONSOL Homes](#) in Malawi works with communities to set up community-owned and operated centres for their vulnerable children. Apart from the activities at the centre for children, widows’ and grandmothers’ clubs are also established, to provide peer support and develop relationships.

“I was afraid – I wanted to commit suicide but ... I now have self value, a lot to still achieve in life, I have hope and I am being encouraged by the members of the support group,” explains one member of such a group.

Far North, South Africa

Far North Community Care and Development operates in rural Limpopo, South Africa, and is supported by REPSSI’s partner the [Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund](#). They run family support groups for caregivers who look after orphans and other vulnerable children. Through these support group, caregivers are taught parenting skills, how to communicate with their children, and about the needs and rights of children.

One mother told us what it has meant to be a part of the group. “Before I joined the family support group, I was shy and isolating myself because of [our poverty] and I couldn’t even communicate with my children. Since I joined the family support group, I have learned parental skills and I learned how to communicate with my children and should there be a problem between my children, I am now able to sit them down and talk about the situation.”

MASO, Zimbabwe

REPSSI’s partner [Midlands AIDS Services Organisation \(MASO\)](#), in Zimbabwe, has helped communities create support groups. These groups are made up of grandmothers, teachers, and even youth. They come together to offer each other support, share experiences, and do some small income-generating activities.

As a result of the *Journey of Life* training, there is now a community register of vulnerable children, and teachers are providing valuable support and referrals. One teacher told us: “If we see that a child is late, or not performing well, we don’t rush into punishment now... we are able to investigate before we act.” Before, there were problems with children attending school, but now every child of the group members is going to school. Members of the group also tell us that now more children in the community are being taken now to get medical treatment.

One grandmother summed up the change: “In the past we would say each problem belongs to its own household, but now we try to help.”

Bringing Hope, One Visit at a Time

It may seem such a small act, but two REPSSI partners in Tanzania are showing that for many people, just being visited is of great importance.

St. Lucia Hospice, Tanzania

Zainabu lost her brother and two sisters, and they left behind six children. In addition to her own three children, she is now responsible for nine children, and also cares for her grandmother and grandmother in law.

Zainabu is HIV+, and recently found herself bed-ridden because she was so seriously ill. But members of St. Lucia’s outreach team came and visited her when she was sick. They cared for her, they counselled her, encouraged her to take ARVs, and taught her about a balanced diet until she could get up out of bed again.

Emotionally, she says she has changed: “I am now thinking HIV is not the end of my life.” She is also able to take three of her children who are HIV+ to the clinic to get them treatment. She has gone on, in fact, to become the chairperson of a Most Vulnerable Children Committee (MVCC) in her area, a voluntary government structure trained and

“Visiting families gives them hope, and respect... it promotes their hope and them thinking that, okay, we are still of worth in this community.”

- Winfrida Mwashala, Director of St. Lucia Hospice and Orphanage

supported by St. Lucia. She now gives of her time to visit other families, to provide them with the same emotional and social support that she herself received.

A mother of one of the families in the community visited by an MVCC member says: “Before the intervention, other people in the community were seeing me as nothing. No-one would listen to me. But now... the committee visit and speak to me and my children, and show that they value me.”



Members of St. Lucia Hospice and Orphanage on visits to households in Arusha, Tanzania

(Bringing Hope, One Visit at a Time contd.)

Africare, Zanzibar

The same is also true in Zanzibar. Shaib Mohamed, the regional manager of [Africare](#)'s project there, explained to REPSSI that the volunteers on his programme used to feel they could not go on a home visit without bringing something material with them, such as food or clothes. But, triggered by REPSSI's training, Africare taught the volunteers how to add value in other ways, such as showing love and care, listening, and equipping the caretakers in caring for their children.

And the reports they are receiving demonstrate that while caregivers appreciated the material support, they value the social and emotional (psychosocial) support more. One elderly man caring for a grandchild by himself, and living in poverty, told

“When you visit us we really feel that there are some people who are caring for us, who are caring for our children.”

Africare “This is the most important thing: knowing how to care for my grandchild.”

“It was like they were all saying that, we would like to be visited,” said Shaib. “We would like to be visited because when you visit us we really feel that there are some people who are caring for us, who are caring for our children.”

New research: Seeing Resilience Rather Than Risk

Within the context of HIV and AIDS, “adolescents” are often synonymous with risk, especially sexually risky behaviour. “But what,” Dr. Claude Mellins of [the HIV Centre for Clinical and Behavioural Studies](#) has asked, “of the tremendous resilience these same young people exhibit?” Despite having experienced great adversity at a young age, such as watching a parent become chronically ill or die, and experiencing stigma, most adolescents are leading positive, responsible lives.

Speaking during her presentation at [AIDS Impact conference, Promoting Resilience in Youth Born with HIV](#), Dr. Mellins challenged delegates to “shift the paradigm from risk to resilience”. You can read a full account of [her presentation on the REPSSI website](#).

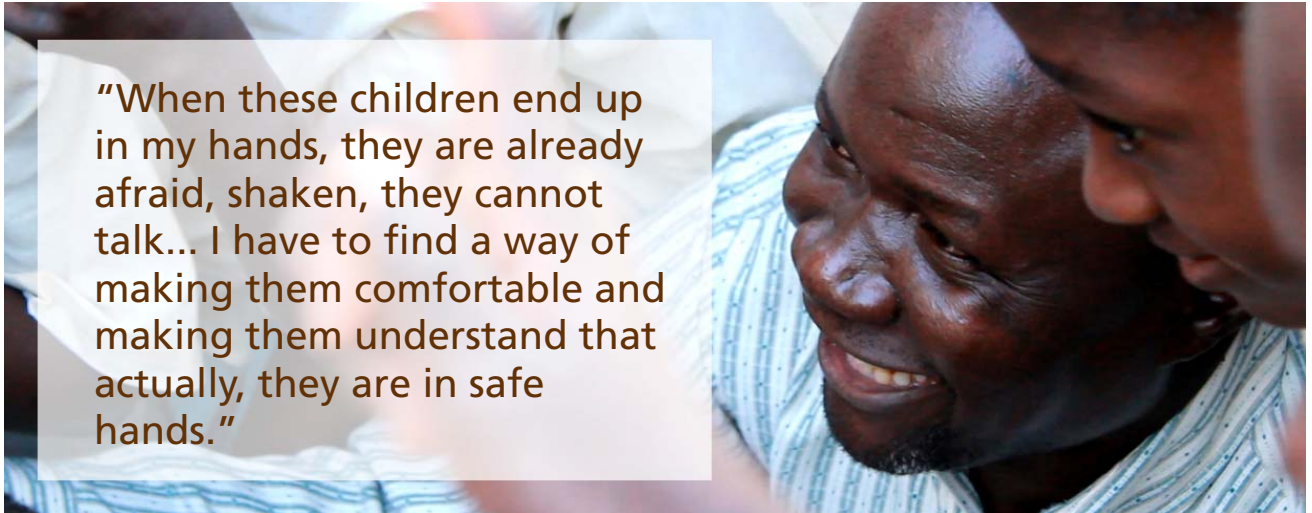


New Research: Older Carers

Approximately half of orphaned children in sub-Saharan Africa are cared for by their grandparents. Yet little research has been undertaken to date into the nature of these relationships. To fill this gap, a study was recently commissioned by [RIATT-ESA](#) and [HelpAge International](#), “[Intergenerational issues between older caregivers and children in the context of AIDS](#)”.

One of the conclusions was the need for psychosocial support for both caregivers and children in these situations. HelpAge International and REPSSI have collaborated on a publication, [Psychosocial Care and Support for Older Carers of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children: Programming Guidelines](#), available to download [here](#).

Certificate Corner: George Owino Ovwor



“When these children end up in my hands, they are already afraid, shaken, they cannot talk... I have to find a way of making them comfortable and making them understand that actually, they are in safe hands.”

George interacting with children during break-time at Kisumu Children's Remand Home, Kenya

Kisumu Children's Remand Home is a government institution, intended as a centre for children in conflict with the law. Due to a lack of space in children's centres they are now being sent large numbers of children needing homes because of being abandoned, orphaned, or abused.

“Many children come here with different problems,” explains Kenneth Mbitio Nuua, Director of the Home. “They really need to be assisted so that they can cope with these situations.” And according to Kenneth, an 18-month accredited Certificate Course is helping his staff do just that.

George Owino is one of three staff at the Home currently taking the distance-learning *Certificate Course in Community-Based Work with Children and Youth*, created by REPSSI and UNICEF.

“This Certificate helped me a great deal,” George explains, “because it has given me a lot of skills in handling these children. I meet children who have passed through many challenges... they end up maybe running away from home ... and after that, maybe they are rescued, taken through the children's justice system. And as you know, not everybody is trained in handling children, so, when they end up in my hands now, they are already afraid, shaken, they cannot talk, some come very much ill... So I have to talk to these children, I have to accommodate them, I have to find a way of making them comfortable and making them understand that actually, they are in safe hands.”

Reflecting on some of the important aspects of the course, he says, “I have managed to understand that respect for human beings is paramount. So, I meet children, different kinds of children and the first thing that normally comes in my mind is that... I should handle this human being with respect.”

George has also been applying skills from the course in addressing wider issues. One day, a nine-year old boy, who was physically disabled, was brought into the remand home. His parents had already died “and he was now wandering here and there, trying to find anybody to take care of him.”

“After listening to the child, I felt that maybe, I could use the networks that I already knew... So I approached one of our partners and they actually took up the case and now this boy is in school.”

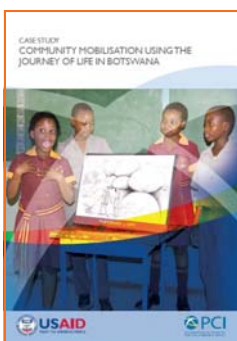
It was module 5 of the Certificate, which focuses on networking, that helped George start to work with other organisations. “As a Development Facilitator, maybe I don't have to have all the solutions,” George laughs, “Sometimes I need to get these solutions from somewhere else.”

The Certificate is accredited by the University of KwaZulu Natal, and delivered in Kenya through the African Centre for Childhood. The third intake will begin in 2012, and will be available in 11 countries in East and Southern Africa. If you are interested in learning more about the Certificate, contact info@repssi.org.

Recommendations for Media and Children

The media, in all its many forms, represents an opportunity for promoting both the participation and the protection of children. However, much work remains to be done to ensure that these principles are respected in the creation of media content.

REPSSI recently assisted in establishing the **Regional Reference Group on Children and the Media**. Members were drawn from media, child rights and policy groups across the region. You can now download the [report of the first meeting of the Reference Group](#), which lays out a set of recommendations for work in this area. [Read more on our website.](#)



News: Journey of Life Case Study, Botswana

A case study on REPSSI's tool, the *Journey of Life*, has just been released by [Project Concern International \(PCI\) Botswana](#). "[Community Mobilisation using the Journey of Life in Botswana](#)" documents how the *Journey of Life* is helping communities identify and better understand the social and emotional (psychosocial) issues of children, and find their own solutions within their own means. PCI has been working with the Government of Botswana (GoB), with funding from [PEPFAR](#), to roll out community-level *Journey of Life* workshops nationally, in order to involve communities in supporting the high numbers of orphans and vulnerable children in the country. [Read more on our website.](#)

Dates For Your Diary:

- 20 November, Universal Children's Day**
 The anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1989.
- 1 December, World AIDS Day**
 An opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, show their support for people living with HIV and to commemorate people who have died. REPSSI will release a special mini-edition of the newsletter focused on HIV and AIDS.
- 4-8 December, ICASA 2011**
[The International Conference on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa \(ICASA\)](#) is the principal forum on HIV/AIDS & STIs in Africa. A [RIATT-ESA](#) satellite session on 7th December will discuss a number of short films documenting the role of community in a child's life.

AIDS Impact 2011

Delegates to the [11th International AIDS Impact Conference](#) heard first-hand from a Swazi school teacher, the director of a rural Kenyan NGO, and a representative from the government of Botswana about innovative efforts to mitigate the impact of AIDS in their respective countries.

These presentations were part of a special track at the conference, hosted by REPSSI, entitled "Systems in Collapse: Experiences from Africa in Strengthening Communities". REPSSI Deputy Executive Director, Lynette Mudekunye, gave one of the closing addresses at the conference. You can [read more, and download the presentations on our website.](#)

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