



U.S. Agency for  
International  
Development

Bureau for  
Global Health

# SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

## Helping HIV-Positive Parents Plan for Their Children's Futures

RUTH WAS STRUGGLING AFTER the death of her husband but found time to comfort other women who, like herself, were HIV positive and trying to manage with the disease. She had many questions about the virus and how it would affect her own life. But two questions loomed larger than all the others: "When I die, what about my children? Who is going to look after my children?" Those questions haunt many parents in Uganda, where nearly 15 percent of all children are orphans. With traditional safety nets provided by extended families breaking down under the weight of the AIDS epidemic, many AIDS-affected children also worry silently about what will happen to them when their parents die.

Using an approach called "succession planning," Plan International, a nongovernmental organization, is helping parents who test positive for HIV to plan for their children's future before they are orphaned. Succession planning helps HIV-positive parents prepare a written will, choose a guardian, and create "memory books" for their children. It also provides child and adult counseling and develops programs involving the community and other services to enable both parents and future guardians to generate income and promote the well-being of children in the long term.

By participating in succession planning, Ruth was able to alleviate some of her worries. She wrote a will, took measures to ensure her daughters' inheritance of her small property, and participated in counseling with her children to help prepare them for her death. When Ruth died suddenly, the guardian she had appointed welcomed the three children into her home. Ruth's daughters still face psychological distress over the loss of their parents, but they had the relative assurance of what was going to happen to them and the opportunity to become accustomed to their guardian.

The Horizons Program and Makerere University, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development, conducted operations research to determine the effectiveness of Plan International's intervention. The program has indeed helped hundreds of families like Ruth's. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic wreaks havoc on families and communities across Africa, the research found that succession planning is providing a critical piece in a continuum of care for AIDS-affected families, including orphans and vulnerable children.

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