

NAMIBIA'S WOMEN AND GIRLS: Reaping The Benefits of Gender Equality?

A Supplement to the UNICEF
State of the World's Children 2007



The State of the World's Children (SOWC) 2007: Women and Children, the Double Dividend of Gender Equality reports on the theme that gender equality and the well-being of children go hand in hand. Ann Veneman, UNICEF's Executive Director, states in the Forward: "When women are empowered to live full and productive lives, children prosper. UNICEF's experience also shows the opposite: when women are denied equal opportunity within a society, children suffer."

The United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan added his voice to UNICEF's call: "when women are healthy, educated and free to take the opportunities life affords them, children thrive and countries flourish, reaping the double dividend for women and children". Yet, in reality, the "lives of millions of women and children throughout the world are plagued by discrimination, disempowerment and poverty". The SOWC 2007 examines the status of women globally and then discusses how gender equality will move all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) forward.

The *Namibia Supplement to the SOWC 2007* looks at the situation of Namibian women and girls in relation to MDG 3 on promoting gender equality in the context of the national commitment to full equality for all its citizens, irrespective of gender. While the global report covers issues of equality in the household, employment and government, the *Supplement* focuses on issues most critical to Namibia.

In particular, the *Supplement* looks at gender-based violence, the effects of HIV and AIDS on women and girls and gender parity in political structures. Namibia has made some commendable efforts in addressing these three challenges which will provide the foundation for effective measures that policymakers and other stakeholders can consider in order to fulfill the rights of Namibian women and girls.

The dividends of empowering women and girls: The Millennium Development Goals set for attainment by 2015, seek global human development by addressing the most critical impediments. Among the eight MDGs, the achievement of the third MDG on promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women would contribute to the achievement of all the MDGs:

MDG1: Reducing poverty and hunger

MDG 2: Ensuring universal education with full gender parity

MDG 3: Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women

MDG 4: Reducing child mortality

MDG 5: Improving maternal health

MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

MDG 7: Ensuring environmental sustainability

MDG 8: Developing new and innovative partnerships for development

In order to achieve MDG 3, special attention needs to be paid to integrate efforts across all the other goals. Female-headed households are among the poorest; illiteracy which is higher among females hold them back from gainful employment, productivity and participation in development; discriminatory beliefs deny access to health care, most critically felt during pregnancy and childbirth; children of poor and illiterate women suffer greater consequences of ill-health and early death from preventable diseases while HIV and AIDS are more adversely affecting women and girls.

The Namibian Dimension: The three issues most critical to Namibia's women and girls are fundamental to the country's achievement of the MDGs and Vision 2030 goals. Gender-based violence, the multiple impacts of HIV and AIDS on women and girls and gender inequality in political participation are manifestations of a deeply-rooted belief generally among men and women alike that women are meant to take a secondary role in society. These entrenched views hold back the nation's development since half its population is not enabled to actively contribute and participate.

The Constitution, legislation and a wide range of progressive policies all provide a positive enabling environment and institutional framework for gender equality. However, the full realisation of women's and girls' rights will depend on a paradigm shift in challenging and changing society's attitudes towards gender equality.

While the following three issues have been highlighted, they are not the only manifestations of inequality in Namibian society. Inheritance rights, property grabbing against widows and orphans, poor maternal health and access to productive employment are other forms of inequality and discrimination relevant in Namibia's context. The three issues are corner stones on which action must be built upon as they will bring about a multiplier effect if societal change can be achieved in addressing them.



- **Gender-based violence**, extreme behaviour that is based on gender inequality and the need to express a sense of male 'superiority' through physical and non-physical domination, is an area of growing concern in Namibia. While rape and murder are well-publicised, more wide-spread and hidden are forms of violence not evidenced by physical scars.
- **HIV/AIDS** is the greatest threat to national development. It is slowing down and could even reverse the gains made in education, health, capacity development and poverty alleviation. Women and girls are especially vulnerable.
- **Political representation** at all levels is a measure of the empowerment of Namibian women. Genuine sharing of authority in formal decision-making processes creates an ethos where women are equal partners in homes and communities. From this position of strength, women are enabled to negotiate for grass-root changes across society.

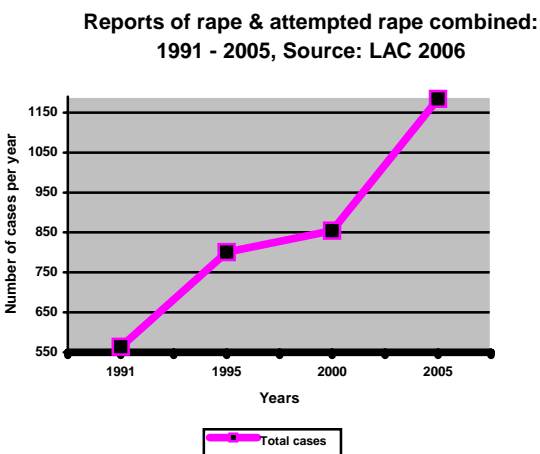
Of the three issues, gender-based violence stands out as the most serious manifestation of society's attitude towards the physically "weaker sex". Hence, greater focus has been given on this extreme example of discrimination and disempowerment of women and girls.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: Namibia's new struggle?

Based only on media reports, women and girls across the country are under siege – in their homes, at school and hostels, on the streets and in places of work. It would appear that no female (even an infant or an elderly pensioner) is safe from becoming a victim of sexual assault, intimate partner abuse or murder, domestic violence, threat or harassment. It could be tempting to attribute the horrific stories to sensational reporting or to ascribe the crime statistics to a higher level of public awareness. While the latter is improving with increased reporting of gender-based crimes, the pervasiveness is reflected in the statistics. Still, it is estimated that only 20% of gender-based violence cases are being reported.

Attitudinal surveys show that many men still view their partners as their property and that they have every right to use violence to gain obedience. In a survey done in 2000, 44% of Namibian men agreed that wife-beating is justified for one or more reasons while in Caprivi region, the proportion was an overwhelming 91%. Though domestic violence is well protected in terms of legislation, it is still a “hidden” subject, hardly discussed even within family circles and hence, difficult to capture in quantitative surveys.

- A sample survey indicates that 73% of gender-based violence is perpetrated by those known to the victim.
- A very high proportion of violent crimes (90% according to data from 1995, with approximately half of them being rape) are committed under the influence of alcohol. More recent Police records show that many rape cases are related to alcohol consumption, whether by the victim or the offender.
- A recent sample survey on HIV/AIDS among young people indicated that almost 24% of females 15-24 years old had their first sexual encounter through forced sex while among 10-14 year olds it was 42%.
- Regional Court (RC) records for January-October 2006 reveal an alarming picture:



- Oshakati Regional Court handled 24 cases of rape in which the ages of complainants ranged from 5 to 60 years with the average age being 16 years;
- Rundu RC dealt with 6 cases of rape and 4 other statutory sexual offences – the youngest complainant was aged 6 and the oldest 42; average age was 16 years;
- Rundu RC dealt with 6 cases of rape and 4 other statutory sexual offences – the youngest complainant was aged 6 and the oldest 42; average age was 16 years;
- Otjiwarongo RC handled 4 cases of rape and 5 cases of murder – the youngest complainant was 8 years and the oldest, 18 years.

While the increase in reporting of cases, which were hidden away in shame in the past, is a positive trend, it should not lead to complacency in attributing the increasing numbers to increased reporting.

Gender-based violence cannot be seen purely in the context of reported physical attacks, or serious crimes. Women and girls who are subject to threats or intimidation, or are placed in a position where they are afraid to exercise their freedoms (to paid work, to education and information, to choices about their reproductive health, inheritance or to seek legal redress). Even without violence directly perpetrated against them, all children whether male or female, who grow up in a violent household – are deeply affected psychologically and tend to perpetuate violence as adults.

While efforts to address this extreme form of gender inequality will need to be varied, understanding the underlying causes of male violence in Namibian society is critical. Various studies have been undertaken or initiated which potentially point to a sense of male insecurity, scars of trauma and past violence, which are in turn dealt out on those who are physically weaker. A recent UNICEF study shows that young men and boys drink alcohol mainly to gain confidence and feel “grown up” which attests to the sense of insecurity and the linkages of gender-based violence with alcohol.

“Just as ‘war starts in the minds of men’, violence is in the minds of men and to end gender-based violence, we must change the minds of men.”

Right Honourable Nahas Angula

Prime Minister, at the Launch of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, Windhoek, 25 November 2006

Foundations for Change: Namibia’s legislation (*Combating of Domestic Violence Act, the Combating of Rape Act and the Children’s Act*) has been cited internationally as progressive in protecting women and children. However, awareness of these provisions is low and implementation capacity is still very limited among the Police force, social welfare and justice systems. Without adequate resource allocations, these legal provisions cannot be enforced effectively and prevention and protection services will remain ineffectual. The fifteen Woman and Child Protection Units (WCPUs) of the Namibian Police have made progress in providing supportive care and investigation of gender-based crimes. However, they are under-resourced in both financial and staffing terms with limited capacity for their investigation work, let alone for community outreach efforts for prevention.

Namibian society’s outrage over media reports on gender-based violence has been reflected in recent demonstrations. More and more civil society organisations have taken on the call for action. These include, Women’s Solidarity, the Namibia Men for Change, Women’s Action for Development, the Legal Assistance Center and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence are beginning to gain momentum each year. Working in conjunction with the Ministries of Gender Equality & Child Welfare, Safety & Security and Justice, civil society organisations are beginning to work actively to sensitise men and boys to the types of attitude and behaviour that perpetrate gender-based violence.

Hearing the Calls for Action: Though the cries of indignation are growing louder, the issue is not yet clearly defined in the national agenda. The calls for action include:

- Greater attention and resources for community-based prevention efforts, protection services and case management by social workers and the police and speedy implementation of the legal provisions by the Judiciary are essential first steps from duty bearers within government and the civil society.
- Greater attention is needed in the high command of the Namibian Police for increased efforts by all police stations to address prevention and service provision than referring cases to the few, under-resourced WCPUs.
- The media need to be more involved in creating the “zero tolerance” environment, to increase reporting of cases and in their own responsible coverage of cases.
- Educators and social workers need to be involved in identifying physical and non-physical evidence of domestic violence and to be trained in sensitive management of cases.



Most critically, better support needs to be offered to women and children who are forced to leave home, or who will suffer financial hardship, through the conviction of a family member who has carried out violence against them. The quality of registered places of safety needs to be assured, and greater oversight is needed in their management. Victims of violence should not fear the consequences of reporting it. Hence, lawmakers will need to continue to find ways of taking action against perpetrators without placing the welfare of victims in jeopardy.

The recent judgments and sentencing in High Court on gender-based and domestic violence cases are a positive trend which will hopefully contribute to deterrence and prevention. Ultimately, “zero tolerance” to gender-based and domestic violence across the entire society, through leadership in words and action by men and women in politics, clergy, traditional and private sector influential citizens, will make a sea change to stem this heinous crime which violates every woman’s right to freedom of movement, protection and life itself.

WOMEN, GIRLS AND HIV/AIDS: the unequal burden

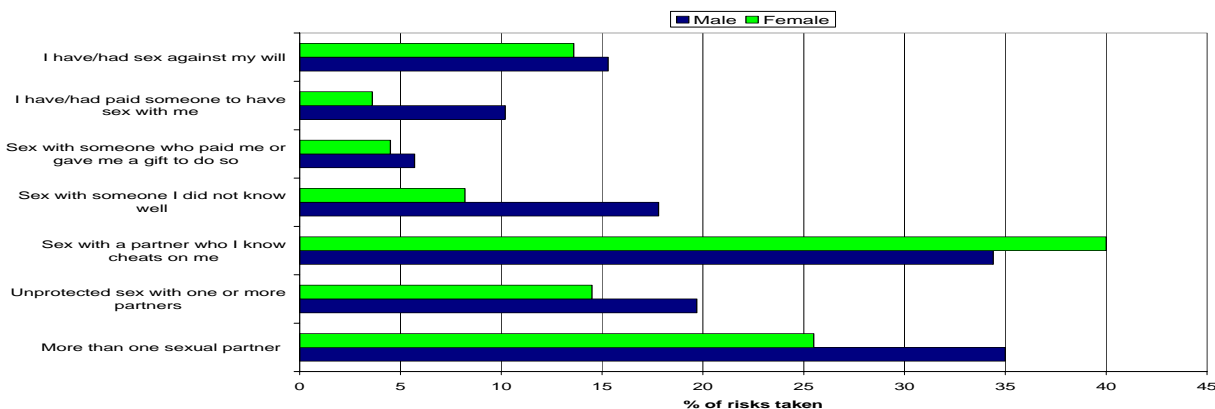
Globally, women and girls are disproportionately more affected by HIV and AIDS. The situation in Namibia is no different. Namibia's prevalence rates are measured only among pregnant women and girls attending antenatal care clinics. Hence, comparative infection rates by gender are not available. Based on known societal attitudes on the status of women evidenced in gender-based violence as a manifestation, the issues around negotiating sex and forced sex are clearly relevant in the Namibian context.

While various studies have been done on knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and practices related to HIV and AIDS, most are of limited sample sizes. Yet, they still indicate worrying trends of gender imbalances in terms of **higher risks for infection for females**:

- ◆ Teenage pregnancies are still high at about 18% of all pregnancies and the so-called “sugar daddy” syndrome continues to be a challenge with almost 42% of females having their first sexual encounter with much older men.
- ◆ Females between 15-24 years would generally not suggest using a condom due to fear of rejection, embarrassment or uncertainties of their partner's feelings.
- ◆ In terms of the types of HIV infection risks taken by males and females, women are more prone to “sex with an unfaithful partner” while men are more likely to “sex with multiple partners” and unprotected sex.

TYPES OF HIV INFECTION RISKS TAKEN

Source: UNICEF KAPB (2006)



High risk behaviours among young people of both genders are again linked to alcohol use and abuse which is on the increase among younger children and youth. The same survey found that one in ten of the 10-14 year olds had used alcohol starting at about age 10 while among 15-24 year olds, three in ten had used alcohol with the median starting age of 15 years.

As in the rest of Sub-Sahara Africa, the growing **burdens of care and support** are also being shouldered by Namibian women:

- ❖ Over 60% of orphans are living in households headed by a grandparent who are mostly grandmothers and the same proportion of households with orphans, are female-headed.
- ❖ Phillipi Trust, one of the main organisations training community-based counseling and psychosocial support providers, reports that 65% of all the people who have come forth for such training have been women.
- ❖ The Church Alliance for Orphans, which has a network providing community-based support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), notes that 70% of the members of their 68 network committees are women even though most of the chairpersons are men.
- ❖ While statistics are not available on Home Based Care for AIDS patients, all agencies working in the field can confirm that women are the primary or sole care providers.

With the increasing burden of care for the sick and of younger siblings falling on the shoulders of women and girls as well as the increased cost of education for extended families with orphans to care for, the potential effects on girls' education need to be carefully monitored. Basic education data still reflects the positive and robust gender parity among boys and girls in Namibia's primary schools. However, experience in other sub-Sahara African countries, equally hard-hit by HIV and AIDS, is showing a decrease in girls' participation in education as families withdraw them

from school to help at home. Also of concern are indications of increased sexual and other forms of abuse of girls who are orphaned. The lack of data in Namibia on these dimensions of the impact of HIV and AIDS should not hold back efforts to prepare for action.

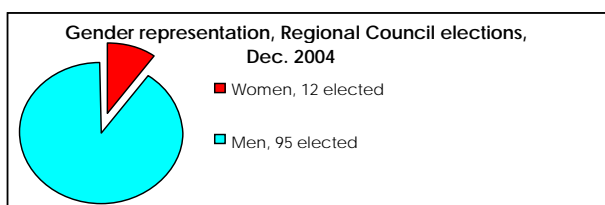
Areas for Action: While gender disaggregated data in all areas of social, economic and political development are essential for monitoring gender equality and parity, it is ever more critical in the area of HIV and AIDS.

- Gender disaggregated data on HIV infection rates, access and utilisation of Anti-retroviral (ARV), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and Tuberculosis (TB) treatment and care are essential for monitoring and redressing any gender imbalances.
- Equally important for data collection, analysis and monitoring are all the areas outlined above in terms of the burden of care and support; female and child-headed households; access to and completion of basic education; access to social welfare grants; and, on issues related to protection from abuse and violence for OVC.
- Groups representing the interest of women and of People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) need to be more fully integrated into the HIV/AIDS policy-making environment – and specifically at the levels of planning for resource allocation, legislative review, strategy development, and regional implementation.

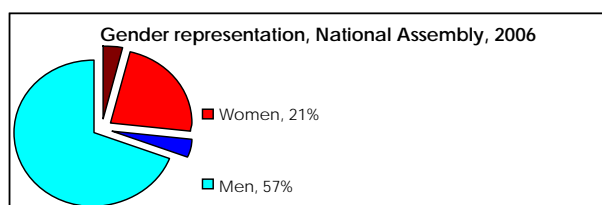
NAMIBIAN WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

The increased involvement and full participation of women at all levels of the decision-making process – from inside their homes to within the government – has profound repercussions for Namibia as a nation striving to reduce poverty and optimise the opportunities for all its people to enjoy an improved quality of life. Considerable progress has been made in the participation of girls and women in education. When it comes to involvement and participation in the arenas of decision-making and political power, the numbers diminish in significance.

- In the social development sector, where women have shown greater involvement, 46% of registered Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are headed by women (66 of a total of 143).
- In regional council elections of 2004, only 11% of a total of 107 seats were filled by women (12).
- In the National Assembly (2006), is 27% of the seats are filled by women (21 out of 78).
- Women hold 23% of the highest national political positions in the Cabinet of the nation (10 out of 43).



Source: Election Commission (2005)



Source: Election Commission (2006)

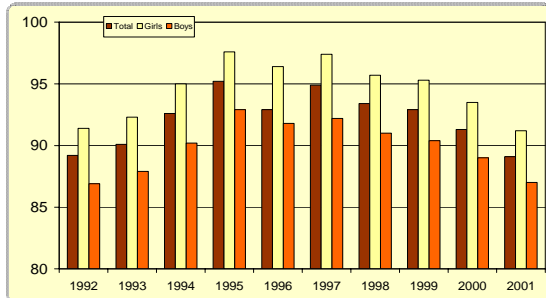
The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development set a target of 30% for women's representation in public service decision-making positions by 2005, which Namibia has done well to exceed overall, although some ministries, offices and agencies are lagging. The African Union (AU) has set a target of 50% representation by 2020, a goal that the Namibia public service will have to galvanise itself to achieve. Although women are well represented in the public service generally, they tend to occupy non-managerial positions.

Considerable efforts have been made with Cabinet appointments of women in senior positions. Further efforts are needed to bring in more women in the regional and constituency levels of government. Only when the leadership of the nation and regional structures shows gender balance and equity can the voices of women be heard. This requires the full involvement and partnership of men in leadership in striving for gender equality in governance.

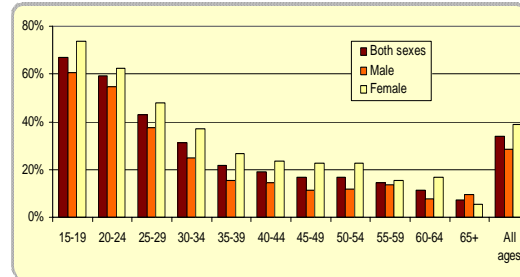
SOME AREAS FOR ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN NAMIBIA

Much has been achieved in Namibia, where gender parity in primary education shines as a beacon in an Africa where such an achievement is far from reach. Yet, as Namibian girls become women, the picture changes: women's participation in the work force drops and female unemployment is much higher than that of males.

Net primary school enrolment 1992 – 2001



Unemployment by age and sex, 2000



Source: GRN – UN CCA (2004)

On the road to gender equality, Namibians will need to question why the early years of equal access to opportunities for girls are denied to women. While there are many approaches adopted successfully in countries where gender equality is improving, some key areas need greater efforts across society. Leadership by influential citizens in setting examples and modeling behaviour for gender equality will make a difference:

- All stakeholders (Government, Private Sector, Educators, the Media, civil society groups, NGOs and churches) must work together to create an enabling environment in which gender stereotypes can be openly discussed, challenged and redressed whether in appointments and elections to key positions or in the decision making processes in families.
- Men need to be full partners in the process of achieving gender equality for Namibian women – the first step towards this is to educate both boys and girls to question entrenched discriminatory views of power-sharing and resource allocation within the home.
- Educators of the next generations of Namibian society hold the key to social change. Hence, they need to question their own socialised biases to become better promoters of gender equality.
- The roles of women within traditional authority structures need to be examined and questioned; their rights within customary law and the potential discrepancies between these and the rights they enjoy under domestic legislation need to be harmonised.
- To address both gender-based violence and HIV prevention as well as many other social ills, alcohol abuse needs to be systematically addressed as an underlying cause. The efforts of the Coalition for Responsible Drinking (CORD) which is attempting to bring about a social movement need to be taken up with vigour and commitment by all key players in Government and Civil Society.

As gender issues lie at the root of many inequalities in Namibia, women also need to be encouraged to participate actively at all levels of public life with full support from their male peers, thus raising the profile of women and improving their capacity to advocate on behalf of children and vulnerable members of society.



REFERENCES

Directorate of Developmental Social Welfare Services (2002), *Proceedings of the 2nd National Conference on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children "Facing Challenges, Ensuring Futures" 25th – 27th June 2002*, MOHSS, Windhoek.

Electoral Commission of Namibia, *Gender Representation at various levels of Government*, 2006

Government of the Republic of Namibia and the United Nations System in Namibia (2004), *Common Country Assessment 2004*, UN Namibia, Windhoek.

Hopwood, G. (2006), *Guide to Namibian Politics*, Namibia Institute for Democracy, Windhoek.

Kaufman, M. (2003), *The AIM Framework Addressing and Involving Men and Boys To Promote Gender Equality and End Gender Discrimination and Violence*, UNICEF

Legal Assistance Centre Gender Research & Advocacy Project (2005), *Namibia Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Service Directory (2nd Edition)*, LAC, Windhoek.

Legal Assistance Centre – October 2006. Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Security on the Motion on Increase in Criminal Activities and Violence: Violent Crimes Against Women and Children

Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (2006), *Statistics on men and women in management positions in the Public Service of Namibia*, MGECW, Windhoek.



Ministry and Health and Social Services, National Planning Commission, and ORC Macro (2000), *Namibia demographic and health survey*, MOHSS, Windhoek.

Ministry of Health and Social Services (2005), *Report of the 2004 National HIV Sentinel Survey*, MOHSS, Windhoek.

Ministry of Health and Social Services, Special Programmes (HIV/AIDS, TB & Malaria) Directorate (2005), *Follow-up to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) Namibia Country Report 2005*, MOHSS, Windhoek.

National Planning Commission (2003), *2001 Population and Housing Census, National Report, Basic Analysis with Highlights*, GVN Central Bureau of Statistics, Windhoek.

Rose-Junius, H. and E. Künzer (2006), *An Investigation into the functioning of WCPU's and Police Stations with regard to the protection of abused women and children in the Country*, UNICEF and MOSS, Windhoek.

Remarks by His Lordship Peter Shivute, Chief Justice, Republic of Namibia, on the Occasion of the Launch of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, Windhoek, 24 November 2006.

Tjombe, N. and P. Harmse (2004), *Review of the compliance of the Namibian domestic law to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, UNICEF and MGECW, Windhoek.

UNAIDS, UNICEF, USAID and WFP Namibia (2004), *Rapid Assessment, Analysis and Action Planning on Orphans and Vulnerable Children*, Windhoek.

UNAM and SARDWIDSAA (2005), *Beyond Inequalities 2005: Women in Namibia*, UNAM/SARDWIDSAA, Windhoek and Harare.

UNICEF (2005), *Childhood under Threat in Namibia. A Supplement to the State of the World's Children Report 2005*, UNICEF, Windhoek.

UNICEF (2006), *State of the World's Children Report 2007*, UNICEF, New York.

UNICEF (2006), *Namibia's Most Vulnerable Children Excluded and Invisible? A Supplement to the State of the World's Children Report 2006*, UNICEF, Windhoek.

UNICEF (2006), *HIV and AIDS knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Behaviour Study in Namibia*, UNICEF Windhoek.

Zimba, R.F. and E. Zimba (2004), *Review of the compliance of Namibian domestic legislation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, UNICEF and MWACW, Windhoek.

UNICEF Namibia First Floor, Sanlam Centre, 154 Independence Avenue, Windhoek
P.O. Box 1706, Windhoek, Namibia
Telephone: (+26461) (061) 204-6111
Fax: Telephone: (+26461) (061) 204-6206
Email: nmbregistry@unicef.org
Website: <http://www.un.na.unicef>

Photos by: Tony Figueira/UNICEF Photo Library

For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY

