

Before Meets After: Addressing Malnutrition through the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Programme

APIN's Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Programme goes beyond linking HIV-affected children, adolescents and caregivers to HIV services to addressing their nutritional, economic and psychosocial needs so that they can grow and thrive in a healthy environment.



When he was only three months old, Aondohemba of Ukum Local Government Area and his mother were referred to APIN by the local OVC backstop in his community. Immediately, our partner organization, Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace (FJDP) visited their home and conducted a Household Vulnerability Assessment (HVA). HVA uses OVC enrolment criteria to identify, profile, quantify and rank the level of vulnerability when working with HIV-affected households.

At the time of enrolment, Aondohemba, was found to be HIV-exposed, meaning that he had been in contact with the virus but his HIV status was uncertain. His mother did not attend antenatal classes throughout her pregnancy and was unaware that she was HIV-positive. In addition, both Aondohemba and his mother were found to be severely malnourished.

If left unchecked in children, malnutrition could lead quickly to death. It is therefore imperative for malnutrition, especially in HIV-positive children, to be promptly identified and managed to reduce the risk of further opportunistic infections and/or mortality. With funding from the U.S President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), APIN works with local community-based organisations like FJDP in Benue State, to implement the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programme.

The programme identifies HIV-affected children, adolescents, caregivers and households, assesses their needs, ensures that they are linked to HIV care and empowers them (through

vocational skills training, cash transfers, economic and financial literacy trainings) to ensure that they are able to sustain their families and provide a stable, health environment for the children to grow in. Aondohemba and his mother were promptly referred to St. Anthony's Hospital, Zaki-Biam, an APIN-supported facility in Ukum LGA, and were placed immediately on antiretroviral treatment (ART). APIN's OVC team began the process of addressing the child's case of Severe Acute Malnutrition. It was discovered that his father, the breadwinner had passed away a day before they were enrolled into the OVC programme, leaving the family impoverished.

In order to accelerate and sustain their recovery, APIN worked with FJDP's Case Manager and the local OVC and Clinical backstops to provide the family with food items, nutritional supplements and an unconditional cash transfer and to conduct follow-up visits and counselling.

Now seven months old, Aondohemba is doing much better and is on his way to making a full recovery. Through the OVC programme, APIN not only ensures that HIV-infected and HIV-exposed children and caregivers like Aondohemba and his mother are placed on ART and retained in care, we also address other health, nutritional, psychosocial and economic needs. We remain committed to empowering more households and helping more children get better health outcomes in spite of the virus.