Social Work Training Program Helps Tanzania Improve Care for Orphans, Vulnerable Children

Twinning Center partners in Tanzania have launched a training program to arm community-based caregivers with basic social work skills in an effort to improve the quality of support available to the country's 2.5 million children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

The Institute of Social Work (ISW) in Dar es Salaam is working with the University of Illinois-Chicago's Jane Addams College of Social Work and the Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center to expand in-service and pre-service training for social workers and other caregivers who provide services and support to orphans and vulnerable children.

Despite the critical need, trained government social workers are presently assigned to only one-third of Tanzania's 126 districts and the country's welfare system is severely overstretched.

Partners are working to change this by building human resource capacity to meet both the immediate and long-term needs of these children, says ISW Principal Dr. Hosea Rwegoshora. "In particular, the para-social worker training project is designed to rapidly scale up support for orphans and vulnerable children by upgrading the skills of community caregivers already working in the field," Rwegoshora explains.

The interactive para-social worker training workshops use lectures, role plays, and small group activities to teach caregivers how to provide support to orphans and vulnerable children.

Under the USAID-funded project, partners are conducting trainings in the high-burden regions of Dar es Salaam, Mbeya, and Iringa.

"Every day, we receive a minimum of three proposals requesting funds for work with orphans and vulnerable children," Dr. Fatma Hafidhi Mrisho, executive chairman of the Tanzania Commission for AIDS, told participants at the inaugural para-social worker training workshop conducted July 9-20 in Dar es Salaam's Temeke Municipality.

Calling the para-social work training innovative, Mrisho lauded partners' efforts to improve care at district and ward levels.

Through the training project, community-based caregivers learn to help children better cope with illness and the loss of family members. They also learn how to provide support to ensure each child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs are met.

Specific topics covered during the two-week workshops include how to identify children in need, the social work process, and how to tap into existing support structures.

So far, 120 para-social workers were trained at the first two workshops. In total, more than 300 will be trained through the project in the coming year.

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