

## **HIV/AIDS, Land and Poverty**

Recently SARPN hosted a regional workshop on HIV/AIDS and land in Southern Africa. The workshop looked at country studies commissioned by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Kenya, Lesotho and South Africa, a study done by Oxfam in Malawi, and a personal narrative recorded in Uganda. Participants, who included researchers, activists, government representatives and regional representatives of FAO, Oxfam and HSRC also heard a number of personal accounts from rural people living with HIV/AIDS.

Although HIV/AIDS clearly affects people living on the land in Southern and Eastern Africa, and in particular the rural poor, there have been few attempts to date to study its impact. The exploratory studies presented at this workshop aimed to focus attention on this area and to provide the basis for discussions on the problems and potential of different research methodologies, the nature of the findings, the potential for further research and how best to integrate research into the development of policy on HIV/AIDS and land issues. Participants and perspectives were also drawn from Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Botswana.

This Poverty Briefing is based on the introductory address to the workshop by Mr W Q-B West, FAO representative in South Africa. In it he outlines the extent of the epidemic, its impact on the economies of countries in the region and on the lives of the rural poor, particularly women and children, and what needs to be done to address the situation.

**T**he rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its devastating impact on nutrition, health, agricultural production, food security, rural livelihoods, and economic and social development present enormous humanitarian and development challenges for all nations. It is now generally acknowledged that AIDS is not only a health issue but also a development issue. The epidemic has had a devastating impact on people living on the land and has contributed to the current food shortages affecting an estimated 13 million people in six Southern Africa countries. Their fate is a stark demonstration of the collective failure to recognise and act upon the deep-rooted links between food insecurity and HIV/AIDS.

Recent statistics illustrate the huge impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Of the 40 million people said to be living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, 95 percent, or 38 million, live in developing countries, with Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for about 28 million of them. Nine out of every ten new cases of HIV infection are in Africa, though it is home to only one tenth of the world population, and 83 percent of all AIDS deaths are in Africa. According to recent FAO estimates AIDS has killed around seven million agricultural workers since 1985 in the 25 most affected African countries, and it could kill 16

million more in the next 20 years. The labour force in the ten most affected African countries is likely to decrease by up to 26 percent while the number of orphans is increasing at an alarming rate.

These alarming statistics emphasise the seriousness of a problem that has undermined the hard-earned agricultural and rural development achievements of the last 40 years. It must be addressed aggressively and pragmatically by governments acting in partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations.

### **The economic impact**

HIV/AIDS affects all aspects of the economy. A study conducted by FAO in one African country showed that the cost of caring for a family member with HIV/AIDS and meeting the subsequent funeral expenses exceeded the average annual farm income. As a result, already poor rural households sell their productive assets, their livestock and land, to care for the sick or pay the funeral expenses.

Traditional safety nets, which contribute to food security in times of need, are breaking down in the worst affected communities as families and neighbours become too overburdened to help each

other with food, loans, or a hand in the fields, or care for the growing number of orphans.

Poverty, widespread in rural areas, leads to poor nutrition and poor health, which make people more vulnerable to HIV infection. Poor nutrition can shorten the incubation period of the virus, causing symptoms to appear sooner. This situation is especially severe for the rural poor, who have the least access to medical care.

Armed conflicts typically fought in rural areas, also increase vulnerability to HIV/AIDS because of sexual violence, displacement of people and destitution.

### Impact on women and children

Gender inequality is one of the driving forces behind the spread of HIV. Men frequently have greater access to resources including land, credit, knowledge, training and technology than women. With the death of her husband, a woman may lose the access she had gained through him or his clan. This immediately threatens her livelihood, and that of her children, perpetuating rural food insecurity and worsening the poverty syndrome caused by gender imbalance.

The dramatic increase in child-headed households also contributes to food insecurity. According to available statistics, in 1999 there were over 13 million AIDS orphans, 95% of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many children are losing their parents before learning basic agricultural skills and nutrition or health knowledge.

HIV/AIDS associated with poverty, malnutrition and social marginalisation establishes a cause and effect relationship with the outcomes of the disease becoming contributing to its further spread. Unless national governments, international bodies, NGOs CSOs and faith-based organisations step up their efforts, the vicious circle of poverty, hunger and HIV/AIDS will intensify.

### Limited knowledge

To date there have been few studies of the implications of HIV/AIDS for land tenure, land rights and land use. Those studies that do exist point to the seriousness of this major gap in our knowledge. For example an FAO study in Namibia showed that 50% of informants had left their land fallow due to labour shortages resulting from HIV/AIDS. Other reports show that HIV/AIDS is negatively affecting the land rights of widows and orphans and that land grabbing is becoming a serious problem.

### Land and livelihoods

Land is the major resource on which the livelihoods of most people in the Southern African region depend. This underlines the urgent need to increase knowledge on this issue so that governments can make appropriate and speedy policy interventions to protect the land rights of HIV/AIDS-affected poor rural households, especially women, orphans and other vulnerable groups. Simultaneously, appropriate policies need to be developed and actions taken to return unused land to production.

### What needs to be done

The aim of the studies presented at this workshop is to contribute to this process by informing policy makers, donors and all those working to achieve sustainable development, food security and poverty alleviation how HIV/AIDS is affecting land tenure institutions, access and rights to land, and land use patterns.

An effective response will require concerted, rapid action from a broad coalition of all sectors sustained by a strong political commitment at the highest levels of government. Integrated community based initiatives should be an important component of national programmes aiming to prevent and mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS.

Gender issues, including the social status and vulnerability of women, their inheritance rights and access to resources such as land, knowledge, technology, agricultural inputs, health and social services, need to be specifically addressed.

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The full workshop report will be available on the SARPAN web site shortly ([www.sarpan.org.za](http://www.sarpan.org.za)).

The workshop papers covered:

- Country case studies
- Methodological research issues and
- The findings of the studies.
- They can be accessed off the SARPAN web, from the “Related Activities” section on the top banner.

### Contact us

SARPAN welcomes any comments or information on this or other issues related to poverty reduction in the Southern African Region. Contact us at:  
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