



Flyer 7: Modifying an Existing Programme

Purpose

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa has reached such crisis proportions that it affects every aspect of life. The goal of “mainstreaming HIV/AIDS” is to ensure that the impacts of HIV/AIDS are addressed and reduced in the communities and within organizations, in all sectors. Many development and humanitarian organizations want to mainstream HIV/AIDS, but do not know where to start.

The purpose of this flyer is to provide ideas for development and humanitarian organisations that want to modify their existing programmes, in ways that make them more relevant to the needs and constraints imposed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Emphasis is on retaining the organization’s primary focus, while supporting efforts to combine HIV prevention, AIDS care and treatment, and mitigation of negative impacts.



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Overview: Oxfam Malawi

Oxfam Malawi is funded by Oxfam GB, Novib, Oxfam Hong Kong, and Oxfam Ireland, and managed by Oxfam GB. The programme review discussed in this flyer focused on the Shire Highlands Sustainable Livelihoods Programme, in Mulanje and Thyolo Districts. The Partner Support Programme involves several organisations in southern Malawi, and two national coalitions on education and economic justice.

Sticking to Core Business

The main principle of the review is that programmes should continue to focus on what the organisation does best, while trying to make the work more relevant to people and organisations affected by HIV/AIDS. If an organisation provides agricultural assistance, such as the Shire Highlands Sustainable Livelihoods Programme in Mulanje, Malawi, the focus should remain on agriculture. Programme modification should not involve a complete overhaul, but rather improve the existing programme through small, incremental steps.

The livelihoods organisations in Mulanje used two main approaches while reviewing their programme:

- Modify existing programme objectives, indicators, and work plan to better account for HIV/AIDS, but do not restructure programmes into something completely different.
- Develop professional partnerships and mutually supporting relationships, both with people affected by HIV/AIDS, and with specialists in HIV prevention, care and treatment. This may include joint planning and implementation of projects undertaken by different agencies, or could entail actually funding others.

Fumakazi Munthali, of Oxfam Mulanje, pointed out the value of closely reviewing current activities: “Without actually examining what we’ve planned or targeted in the next three years or so, [mainstreaming HIV/AIDS] can be a song that doesn’t really materialise. But if we say these are the issues, where does our programme fit - it can help to make it a reality.”

This is one of a series of flyers designed to assist organisations in mainstreaming the issue of HIV/AIDS into their core work and internal policies, without losing their primary focus. This is Flyer 7 (29 October 2001).



Process Followed in Malawi: Modifying an Existing Programme

A group of Oxfam and partner staff met for three days in June 2001, to review and modify the existing Shire Highlands Sustainable Livelihoods Programme to make it more relevant to the realities of HIV/AIDS, without completely shifting the programme direction and purpose.

- Most of the participants had been involved in field research on the local epidemic in March 2001, so they could work on the basis of their practical experiences and lessons learned about HIV/AIDS.
- Oxfam invited people with HIV/AIDS, and specialists on HIV prevention, care and treatment, to ensure broad participation, gain from expert experience, and reinforce importance of on-going collaboration.
- Discussions started with an overview of existing programme objectives, indicators of success, key interventions and work plan, to ensure all participants were clear of current programming directions.
- Staff researchers put existing programme into context of HIV/AIDS. They reviewed main findings from field research on understanding affects of HIV/AIDS in communities and in organisations, and how different people respond.
- Researchers divided into teams with people from various sectors (e.g. health people to review agricultural components). Teams worked individually but regrouped to share insight.
- Teams assessed work plan and indicators, with attention to possible changes in:
 - target groups (greater focus on orphans, youth, elderly, etc);
 - interventions (e.g. support labour saving activities);
 - approaches (go beyond community meetings and group work, link with home care visits, etc);
 - partnerships (especially those working in HIV prevention, care and treatment).
- The main question explored was, “Is this relevant to people affected by HIV/AIDS, in terms of needs and constraints in labour, time, skills and experience, and morale? How could it be done differently?”
- Beyond the work plan: based on our learning, what other issues do people with or affected by HIV/AIDS confront, and how could a livelihoods programme begin to address them?
- Discussed suggestions, including whether programme could realistically address them all at same time.

Follow-up Actions in Malawi

- Advocacy: now considering how to build on useful experience at district level, to get greater attention to HIV/AIDS into policies and practices at national level in government departments and NGOs
- Continual efforts to meet with affected people, including discussion and review of programme activities and ways of working to make them more relevant
- Upgrading monitoring system to see whether programme actually minimizes impacts of HIV/AIDS

Key Points to be Considered

- **Stick to core business:** Agriculture, education and other sectors are important. How can development workers work with specialists in HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment, without replacing them?
- **Don't shift too far:** Fighting HIV/AIDS is fundamentally important to poverty reduction, but not all development interventions have to be directly ‘relevant’ to those worst affected by HIV/AIDS. What programmes could still be useful to those less affected by AIDS, but still suffer from poverty?
- **Start simple:** An entire programme should not be overhauled all at once. What are a few practical, yet meaningful, steps that can be taken by an organisation starting to address the issue of HIV/AIDS?
- **Long-term outlook:** Many people are not affected by HIV/AIDS now, but will be in future. What activities may help them to improve their resilience now, so they will be less vulnerable later?

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