

# MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF HIV/AIDS ON FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

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## Summary Report

**VETAID**  
**Maputo, Mozambique**  
**3 to 7 November 2003**

## **INTRODUCTION:** **HIV/AIDS, AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY**

Because of the increased mortality the HIV/AIDS pandemic causes it has become increasingly obvious that HIV/AIDS can no longer be considered solely as a health issue, as the pandemic has wide ranging socio-economic impacts on all sectors, in particular on agriculture. Because of HIV/AIDS, decades of development have been lost in Africa, as efforts to reduce poverty and enhance living standards have been greatly undermined.

Eastern and southern Africa is currently at the epicentre of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with the fastest growing HIV infection rates in the world and with rural areas increasingly affected. In some countries HIV prevalence rates have risen higher than thought possible, exceeding 30%: Botswana (38.8%), Lesotho (31%), Swaziland (33.4%) and Zimbabwe (33.7%).<sup>1</sup> HIV/AIDS is now the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa accounting for a quarter of all mortality: in comparison malaria accounts for less than one tenth. To put the impact into perspective, southern Africa is home to about 30% of people living with HIV/AIDS, yet the region has less than two per cent of the global population.

The countries most affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic are also the most heavily reliant on agriculture with over 70% of their populations dependent on small-scale agriculture for food and their livelihoods. Many rural communities in Eastern and Southern Africa faced with high prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS are already suffering from high morbidity and mortality rates among the most productive members of their communities. Examples from all the African countries represented at the conference indicate that the pandemic is disproportionately affecting the agricultural sector and developing into a serious problem that will affect or is already affecting the agricultural productivity, nutrition and food security of rural households.

Agricultural productivity is affected through the loss of skilled and unskilled agricultural labour; reduction in smallholder agricultural production; a decline in marketing surplus production; the loss of indigenous farming methods; decreased inter-generational transfer of knowledge; and specialised skills & practices. Income and food reserves are severely reduced and savings & assets depleted to meet health care, living and funeral costs. Furthermore the high number of people needing care and the high death rate is stretching traditional systems of mutual assistance to their limits. Formal and informal rural institutions are affected by the loss of human capital resulting from the rising scale of staff morbidity and mortality. All dimensions of food security – availability, stability, access and utilisation of food, are affected where HIV/AIDS prevalence is high, posing a threat to entire nations.

In addition, the effects of the pandemic are compounded through the close association of HIV/AIDS with poverty, poor nutrition and food insecurity: HIV/AIDS increases the depth and extent of rural and urban poverty. The current food crisis in southern Africa highlights the dynamic interplay between HIV/AIDS and other crises. Due to drought and poverty people leave the rural areas and their families to procure an income in the cities and to send food home. Once there many have to rely on risky livelihood strategies that expose them to HIV infection. In the mean time, urban people who become ill because of AIDS can no longer send either money or goods to their families and have to return to their rural homes to receive care. These effects of the pandemic are exacerbated by the ongoing food crisis, which has led not only to further increases in food insecurity and vulnerability of households to HIV, but also to an increase in

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS (Dec 2002): AIDS epidemic Update.

poverty. The vicious cycle of poverty, food insecurity and HIV/AIDS is in full swing in the region and showing no signs of abating.

As a result many feel that the HIV/AIDS pandemic should be considered an emergency with different impacts to those of say man made or natural disasters like civil war or drought. This is due to the impact the pandemic has on labour structure and household composition.

Despite the fact that almost 80% of the people in the most affected countries are dependent on agriculture for their subsistence, nearly all the response to the pandemic has been channelled through the health sector. Most governments, NGOs and international organisations have concentrated their actions on prevention (particularly on improving the control of transmission and the alleviation of health impacts), through awareness campaigns among their staff and among beneficiary communities, to prevent new infections and arrest the spread of the disease.

Responses to mitigating the social and economic impacts of the pandemic in rural areas have not received as much attention or funding. Some institutions have started actions to mitigate the effects but the majority of these are active in urban areas. Associations of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) usually start among the better-informed and more affluent urban communities and tend to concentrate their activities in these areas. Community based organisations (CBOs), faith based organisations (FBOs) and other grassroots organisations who work at the cutting edge of the pandemic have also tended to concentrate on prevention and care as opposed to mitigation. Until now, very few organisations have initiated activities to mitigate the wide-ranging socio-economic effects of HIV/AIDS in rural areas.

In the face of the potentially devastating impacts the HIV/AIDS pandemic can and will have on the agriculture sector, governments and their international partners (e.g. UN) need to ask themselves what they can do to mitigate the impact of the spreading pandemic. Which agricultural policies and programmes can be used to effectively combat the wide-ranging socio-economic impacts? The agricultural sector is best placed to implement and develop activities to address growing food insecurity and to maintain/increase agricultural production taking into account the effect of HIV/AIDS on farming communities, and to implement strategies to overcome the upsurge in young adult morbidity/mortality.

All those involved however, will have to take into account the demographic implications the pandemic has on rural household composition as community infrastructures weaken and as beneficiaries might be destitute families, child-headed or elderly-headed households. To effectively assist these beneficiaries will require innovative approaches to project design and implementation. Providing equipment or inputs on credit for example, is not feasible when working with the destitute or households with large numbers of orphans.

One approach would be to use what we already know – there is a wealth of experience in improving food security, poverty alleviation and development activities. The challenge is not only to use what we already know to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS, but also to integrate or mainstream HIV/AIDS into national poverty alleviation & development strategies and to utilise a multisectoral approach in policy and programme formulation and when implementing interventions to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS.

However, in order to be able to effectively address the effects of the pandemic through appropriate mitigation strategies there is a need for some form of impact assessment framework (similar to environmental impact assessments (EIA) for example) in order to determine their

success or failure. Each country will need to develop their own according to the scope of their interventions, the socio-economic & political environment within which it will be implemented.

The importance of mitigating the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic cannot be underestimated, because the human and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic will persist long into the future regardless of the success of any prevention messages, increased access to antiretroviral drugs, or even the development of an effective vaccine. The burden of the pandemic increases over time because it takes, on average, seven to ten years post infection before falling ill and, if there is no treatment, before dying. Even if by some miracle the spread of the disease were halted, people would still become ill and die (eventually) and we would still need to address the effects of the pandemic and associated mortality for generations to come.

We are not advocating that mitigation is more important than prevention but that mitigation is becoming more and more important now that morbidity and mortality are taking their toll. Until now, not all stakeholders have adequately addressed the problem of mitigation, and ultimately the appropriate response is probably a combination of prevention and mitigation activities aimed at halting further infection and at alleviating the growing effects. It should be stressed that without prevention the spread of the disease would not be halted and any efforts to mitigate its effects would never be sufficient.

## **OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN OF THE CONFERENCE**

Participants from 18 countries (Botswana, Brazil, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Netherlands, Rwanda, Somaliland, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom, USA, Zambia, Zimbabwe) representing government ministries (agriculture & health), international and national NGOs, multinational organisations - UN, academic institutions, research institutions, donors, private sector agro-industrial companies, farmer associations, CBOs, FBOs and PLWHA associations met to discuss & address the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic to food security and agriculture.

In general the conference created a forum for the exchange of experiences and information and an environment to produce recommendations and strategies that can be used to lobby for support and to influence policy.

The main aim of the conference was to contribute to the ongoing work on mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS on the agricultural productivity of rural communities in eastern & southern Africa by exploring and developing responses to:

- ✧ Labour scarcity, be it as a result of migration, increases in adult morbidity/mortality, etc.
- ✧ The changing role of rural extension, development and emergency projects, in the context of the pandemic
- ✧ The increase in challenges faced by traditional coping mechanisms and systems of mutual assistance

The conference proposed identifying a number of sustainable initiatives that could assist rural communities' to mitigate the diverse effects of HIV/AIDS in eastern & southern Africa and/or assist extension services redefine their strategies. The aim for people working in agriculture and food security was to build on current experiences and mechanisms to mitigate the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in these areas, and to improve on current strategies to maintain agricultural

production at a level that provides food security to rural communities under the conditions created by the pandemic.

This conference follows on from earlier exercises: The FAO organised a seminar in Bangkok<sup>2</sup> in November 2002, where key government officials and international agencies from African and Asian countries discussed the effects of HIV/AIDS in rural areas and the implications this had for education and training in Africa and Asia. VETAID too had organised a seminar in Maputo, in collaboration with FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture in August 2003, which focused on the impact of HIV/AIDS on rural communities and on agriculture.

The conference had the following specific related objectives:

- ✧ To raise awareness of the effects of HIV and AIDS on the agriculture and livestock sectors
- ✧ To identify ways of collaborating between projects, government, NGOs, donors, and between emergency and development activities
- ✧ To analyse the best ways to evaluate impact mitigation projects given the long term nature of the effects of HIV/AIDS and the fact that results have to be evaluated against predictions that are based on imprecise and incomplete information
- ✧ To identify strategies to build on established coping mechanisms for impact mitigation activities
- ✧ To initiate and/or strengthen collaboration and partnerships between NGOs, Government and International Organisations and cross-border partnerships
- ✧ To disseminate the results of this conference

In order to address these aims and objectives the conference was organised into four themes, one per day, under which the various issues and objectives were raised and discussed, comprising:

1. HIV/AIDS Impact Mitigation: Its Importance Now and in the Future
2. Evaluating Interventions: Monitoring, Evaluation and Making Use of Data
3. Practicalities for HIV/AIDS Impact Mitigation: The Way Forward
4. Recommendations: Integrating Impact Mitigation

The beneficiaries of this conference are the planners and implementers of activities in poor, rural African communities that depend on agriculture and livestock for subsistence, food security and income.

Through these players, the conference results will reach rural communities affected by HIV/AIDS, the ultimate beneficiaries. The findings will be addressed not only to decision-makers and donors, who may be remote from the ultimate beneficiaries, but also to representatives of implementing organisations, associations of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), farmers associations and members of the private sector who work directly with the beneficiaries. VETAID will make an effort to distribute the report as widely as possible, and requests readers to share it with others who are engaged in the fight against the pandemic.

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<sup>2</sup> FAO/UNESCO (Nov 2002): Education for Rural Development in Asia – Experiences and policy lessons, FAO/UNESCO seminar Bangkok, Thailand 5-7 November 2002.

## **CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE CONFERENCE**

The conference offered participants a chance to share experiences, discuss the merits of new strategies to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS, review how HIV/AIDS is impacting on food security and the agriculture sector, and created an environment in which they could reflect on the best way forward for themselves and their institutions.

It also presented the opportunity for practitioners and those who work to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS to put together recommendations for all the stakeholders involved in the future of HIV/AIDS impact mitigation, as summarised above. The very fact that this conference took place at all has helped highlight the linkages between HIV/AIDS, agriculture and food security, and the material contained within this report will be used to lobby governments, policy makers, implementers, donors and national AIDS councils, thus guaranteeing that the issues raised do not die quietly and that the needs of those suffering the consequences of HIV/AIDS are supported at all levels.

The links between HIV/AIDS, agriculture and food security are indisputable. What needs to happen now, as demonstrated throughout the conference, is for an environment to be created in which affected communities can be heard, assisted, supported and empowered to overcome and resolve their problems and priorities.

People living with HIV/AIDS, their families and communities are being overcome by the effects of the pandemic. Their traditional coping mechanisms are not coping with the extra burden of these effects and households are resorting to risky survival strategies such as selling essential assets or exchanging sex for food and money. The breadwinners and workers (be they farmers, miners or in any other sector) are leaving the inexperienced to assume their responsibilities as households struggle to cope in the face of the morbidity and mortality the pandemic brings, and the downward spiral leading to poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition begins.

Measures to defend families from the effects of HIV/AIDS must include food security interventions, based on sound, sustainable agricultural practices appropriate to those who have to implement them. This must be backed up by support for livelihood strategies including diversifying from exclusive dependence on agriculture, by lessening the burden on the household members whose responsibility it is to collect water and fuel every day, and by creating an environment in which children can be children and go to school instead of having to assume adult responsibilities at an early age.

Information on the results, successes and failures of interventions must be shared and available to all so that we can learn from one another, and see to it that the most appropriate strategies and interventions are put into place as soon as possible. Individuals and communities must be invited to contribute to the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions instead of outsiders dictating the resolution to their problems, and policies must reflect their real needs and priorities. Time must be given for changes to become sustainable, rather than rushing to complete everything and leaving it to flounder when external assistance comes to an end.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONFERENCE**

Appropriate livestock



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In this section a summary of the recommendations from the themes covered by this report will be presented, as will the recommendations that came up in conversation informally throughout the conference.

### **IMPACT MITIGATION**

- ⌘ *Use what we already know.*
- ⌘ *Encourage interventions in rural agricultural communities* as that is where over 70% of the population lives (on average in sub-Saharan Africa).
- ⌘ *Support agricultural development* as it is the livelihood for 80% of the population.
- ⌘ *Prevention and awareness* should not be excluded from mitigation activities.
- ⌘ *A food security response* linking short- and long-term interventions is essential.
- ⌘ *Adequate resources and capacity* have to be allocated to HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and mitigation campaigns.
- ⌘ *Increase* the number of and support to interventions working to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS.
- ⌘ *Appropriate M&E systems* should be employed to ensure that beneficiaries, implementers, policy makers, donors and other stakeholders have the information on whether interventions are working or not. Pilot projects need to be encouraged and if they work should be replicated.
- ⌘ *Use the five assets defined in the DfID / FAO livelihoods approach* to M&E the effectiveness of impact mitigation interventions, depending on the type of intervention, the socio-economic environment of the target group and on the level of HIV/AIDS prevalence. As HIV/AIDS affects the whole household livelihood strategy, this fact must be reflected in evaluations if we are to capture the full effect of any proposed interventions.

- ⌘ There is a need to **move away from qualitative descriptions** and to integrate the use of health & demographic indicators and agricultural production indicators into an impact assessment framework for HIV/AIDS.
- ⌘ **A core impact assessment methodology** is needed similar to those formulated for Environmental Impact Assessments, which will provide information that can be used to compare the impact of projects, between projects, in different areas and in different countries.
- ⌘ **NACs should assess** the level to which HIV/AIDS and food security is addressed in current policy, strategic plans and in the poverty reduction strategy. It is suggested that this should be done through a task force involving key stakeholders.
- ⌘ **NACs should be multi-sectoral** and advise national governments and donors on HIV/AIDS and food security.
- ⌘ **Ministries of agriculture** must: modify their existing policies and programmes to make them more relevant to the needs and constraints posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic; support multisectoral efforts to combine HIV prevention, HIV/AIDS care, treatment & mitigation, and; guarantee that they have an internal work-place policy regarding HIV/AIDS.
- ⌘ **Focal points** should be given real power.
- ⌘ **HIV/AIDS related work-place policies** should be the norm for all stakeholders.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

- ⌘ **Use what we already know** and don't waste energy resolving problems that already have solutions courtesy of past experiences.
- ⌘ **Do all you can to raise awareness** of the links between HIV/AIDS, agriculture and food security at all levels to avoid communities and households slipping into poverty, food insecurity and detrimental livelihood strategies such as asset stripping.
- ⌘ **Collaboration and building partnerships** between projects, governments, research institutions, NGOs, CBOs, donors and the private sector to be able to effectively meet the challenges posed by the pandemic is of utmost importance.
- ⌘ **Ensure full participation by the government, private sector and civil society** in all HIV/AIDS programmes.
- ⌘ **Promote information sharing and collaboration** so as to speed up the transfer from pilot projects to large-scale effective implementation.
- ⌘ **PLWHA must be included** in all phases of project design & implementation as people who have lived the effects have valuable experiences to be heard.
- ⌘ **Avoid parallel structures** by using and support existing government structures and not weaken those that already exist by creating new ones.
- ⌘ **Consider all aspects of development** and implement holistic interventions that are identified through participative research.
- ⌘ **Implement projects of 5-6 years minimum** to give time for new ideas and technologies to be accepted and absorbed.
- ⌘ **Target beneficiaries** based on vulnerability, not cause, i.e. a child should be supported as orphan not as AIDS-orphan in order to avoid stigma.
- ⌘ **Pursue interventions that create minimal external dependence** in order to increase the chances of sustainability.
- ⌘ **Promote appropriate agricultural practices** bearing in mind: labour availability; paying particular attention to nutritious, non-labour intensive crops; and apply livestock to generating income, raising nutrition and enhancing draught power.



- ⌘ **Information** must take into account the social and cultural aspects of the target groups, use locally appropriate means of communication and involve all stakeholders so that everyone's needs are met.
- ⌘ **Information and communication** should be employed at all levels and for all stakeholders involved in awareness & advocacy and training and education programmes.

#### **AT COMMUNITY LEVEL**

- ⌘ **Use what they already know** - communities are fonts of very useful information and with support for existing mechanisms can identify their problems & priorities and implement sustainable answers to them.
- ⌘ **A participatory approach** is fundamental as it will be the affected community that are best able to identify their problems and they who have to resolve them.
- ⌘ **Community-based mitigation strategies** should be adaptable & appropriate and strengthen rather than replace the traditional coping mechanisms of communities.
- ⌘ **Promote income diversification & income-generating activities** with improved household consumption.
- ⌘ **Mitigation efforts should include support to:**
  - Traditional labour-sharing practices
  - Labour exchange
  - Home-care for the sick and dying
  - Childcare
  - Communal farming
  - Apprenticeships (for orphans), and
  - Educational and nutritional assistance.
- ⌘ **Storage and processing technologies** should be improved.
- ⌘ **Labour efficient methods of collecting water and fuel** should be introduced.
- ⌘ **Labour saving crops and technologies** must be introduced using on-farm experiments & demonstration.
- ⌘ **Formal and semi-formal agricultural education** must be provided through peer education, links with schools, farmer field schools, including agriculture in the curriculum, school gardens, etc.

Bringing chickens to vaccinate



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The conference was organised by **VETAID** in Mozambique.  
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The **EUROPEAN COMMISSION** was the main donor of the conference.



The **TECHNICAL CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL COOPERATION (CTA)** gave financial support, planning and organisational assistance prior to the conference.



**DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IRELAND** and **AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION** gave financial support.

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