In 2001 the United Nations described the AIDS pandemic as a threat to global security. In 2003 the World Health Organization declared the treatment gap between the developed and developing worlds a global health emergency. In this volume of Development Update, a range of authors from across Southern Africa examine what these statements mean for development and progress in countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The collection of authors brought together here are unusual: while all calling for greater action on HIV/AIDS, they challenge ‘traditional’ approaches to HIV prevention, understandings of gender, and detail the impact of political denial on the course of the pandemic. In the ‘era of treatment’ they provide first-hand and frontline reports on the opportunities and challenges presented by expanding treatment in resource-constrained settings. This is essential and uncomfortable reading for policy-makers, politicians and anyone concerned with, and committed to, human rights and sustainable development in Southern Africa.