
Sustaining Livelihoods in Southern Africa

Issue: 6 June 2002
Theme: HIV/AIDS and sustainable livelihoods

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Editor's notes

This month's theme is HIV/AIDS and sustainable livelihoods. The newsletter highlights the impact of HIV/AIDS on the sustainable livelihoods, especially the pentagon of assets namely; human, social, physical, natural and financial assets. Janet Steely of the University of East Anglia is a co-editor of this newsletter.

Some background to the HIV/AIDS epidemic

At the end of 2001, 40 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS, 90 per cent in developing countries and 75 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2001 there were 3 million AIDS-related deaths. Sub-Saharan Africa is frequently viewed as the 'hot spot' of the epidemic, but the impact is global and cross sectoral. Significant epidemics occur in SE Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean and Eastern and Central Europe. The importance of addressing the impact on development of HIV/AIDS has been highlighted in the Millennium Development Goals where Target 6 is to 'have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS'. Commitment by African governments to address the pandemic is demonstrated in NEPAD, a pledge by African leaders to work together for the common good.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on livelihoods

Livelihoods approaches offer a holistic way of addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic which promote joined up thinking across sectors and disciplines, that can look not just at the impact on health but also at the impact on social support, finances, housing, land-use and land tenure. After all, a person living with AIDS does not stop being a family or community member, a land holder or a house tenant, a carpenter or a share cropper, or for that matter an educated or literate person. HIV/AIDS may alter access to work and financial assets, to family and community, but a person with HIV/AIDS is still a person; a fact that has often been undermined by the use of labels like 'AIDS victim' and 'AIDS patient'. Medical conditions often rob a person of their status as *a person*, and AIDS, particularly with the stigma associated with the condition, is no exception.

Let's look at some of the elements of the livelihoods framework and think about some of the ways the HIV/AIDS epidemic is altering the shape of peoples' lives, a shape which sustainable livelihood approaches need to be sensitive and responsive to.

Human Capital

AIDS-related illnesses affect the health of those infected with the HIV virus. That is perhaps the most obvious impact on human capital. A carer's human capital is lost to their office work, or to tilling the fields. Those who travel to take care of other family members are not available to participate in their own family decision-making, caring, farming, small business etc. Children who are carers lose out on school, lose an education that might have equipped them better for the world. And knowledge is lost, knowledge of crops or medicines or of the history of the family, the community. That knowledge, memories, which are part of our 'capital' that is shared and enriches lives.

Natural capital

Land, forests, water, crops and animals are all affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Land may not be tilled and certain crops may not be grown because of the lack of labour, and land may be sold to pay medical fees, funeral costs or everyday household expenses. Forests may not be managed, with some areas being over harvested because they are close to home for labour starved households. Depleted water bodies may be over-exploited as a household with a sick person who requires frequent washing takes more than their usual share. The management of land, forests, fish, animals and water has to adapt to altered demands and use.

Financial Capital

Access to credit for people living with HIV/AIDS is something some NGOs are now seeking to address. Like insurance and investments, who would lend money to someone who has an illness with a death sentence? Who would lend to a family where someone has died of AIDS, how do they know that others are not also infected? Access to credit has never been easy for the poorest sections of communities, and seldom has it been easy for women. HIV/AIDS has made it harder. High interest rates, to cushion the risk for the lender, make loans prohibitive, undermining even the most modest agricultural or business development.

Physical Capital

The sick or those busy with care cannot repair a leaking roof, fix a faulty engine on the motorbike, or join in community efforts to clear clogged drains in the road. Infrastructure deteriorates if people have no time, energy or the numbers to maintain it. Field terraces, which depend on regular maintenance crumble, soil fertility declines without people to spread manure or leaf litter, and to make compost. Clogged irrigation channels adversely affect growing crops, stagnant water in the clogged channels encourage mosquitoes that may spread dengue or malaria and tsetse flies. Cattle-proof fences and trenches fall down without regular care and animals wander off or destroy crops and young trees.

Social Capital

Death and sickness erode social networks. Friends and families are lost making the maintenance of the kin group more difficult. Cultural events diminish... except for funerals. Some cultural and social events may change because of the risk of HIV/AIDS or become less attractive to those afraid that social activity may spread the virus. In the absence of formal credit, the loss of family and friends may spell the end of access to informal, affordable, credit as well as the loss of a trusted carer for a child or old person.

Policies and institutions can play a key role in 'transforming' livelihoods. An aim of sustainable livelihoods approaches is to build or reform policies, laws and institutions so that they provide better opportunities for the poor and to ensure that attention to HIV/AIDS is not confined to health strategies and policy making. Public denials that HIV-infection causes AIDS do nothing to support those working to halt the epidemic. Laws, policies, campaigns against cultural practices which may spread the virus (such as widow-inheritance) have little impact when public figures spread misinformation. HIV/AIDS strategies for governments, non-government organisations, multi-nationals, bilateral donors etc, can only be more than paper statements if senior people take responsibility for moving the words into action.

Sickness can be viewed as a part of the **Vulnerability Context**, particularly if one thinks in terms of a region or country where HIV prevalence rates are high and the risk of infection from unprotected sex, contaminated blood transfusions as well as mother to child transmission are a reality of life, something everyone may be vulnerable to. As well as being a part of the vulnerability context, HIV/AIDS compounds the problems posed through vulnerability to natural disasters, seasonal changes and the shock of accidents or sudden (non-AIDS related) illness. Such 'vulnerabilities' do not go away, and may be felt more keenly.

What are the implications of SLAs on our approach to HIV/AIDS?

Sustainable livelihoods approaches place people at the centre of development, rather than focusing on the resources they use or a single activity. If we start with the person in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic we look beyond and around the epidemic, the clinical condition, or the medical solution, and through livelihoods analysis take into account the other things going on now and in the past in their life, or the life of the household, community or region. Livelihood diversification has always been important as a coping strategy for poor people faced with an uncertain world: harvests fail, market prices fall, factories close, and the informal economy is constrained by legislation. People adapt. The hardship inflicted by HIV/AIDS, through the loss of family members, the costs of care; the loss of workers etc. highlights the need for support for different livelihood strategies at times of crisis and beyond.

Yes, there are gaps, yes there is much to learn, but perhaps the biggest challenge facing us is to build on the strengths of what is already known, what is already tried and tested. Using a 'livelihoods lens' which enables us to look 'cross-sectorally' we should be able to recognise with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as with many other aspects of life, that it is inappropriate to look at urban or rural areas in isolation or divide people up by risk group. We can and must learn with people who have 'mainstreamed HIV/AIDS' in their own lives out of necessity, and have developed successful ways to mitigate the impact of the epidemic. That is a strength on which to build, and a challenge to rise to.

Key SL document

Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A preliminary resource paper. Janet Seely and Colin Pringle. Department for International Development: Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office. (2001). This resource paper is a product of the study that was commissioned by the Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office of UK's Department for International Development. The paper seeks to, first, look at the impact of HIV/AIDS on the sustainable livelihoods, and that impact can be mitigated. Secondly, the paper highlights the challenges of HIV/AIDS to sustainable livelihoods approaches, and these could be addressed. To access to paper, write to Janet Seely at jseely@uea.ac.uk.

AIDS in Africa: An African and Prophetic Perspective. Rev. Dr Mankekolo Mahlangu-Ngcobo, MPH. Gateway Press, Baltimore. 2001. Written in a clear and simple English, the book explains facts around the HIV/AIDS disease. That is, the cause of the disease, mode of spreading, and ways to avoid to contract the disease. The roles of the African family, African Non-Governmental Organisations, African Governments, African Faith Communities and the International Communities are highlighted. Rev. Dr. Mahlangu-Ngcobo could be contacted at Mankekolo@aol.com.

Youth Livelihoods and HIV/AIDS. In Focus. January 2001. This is a paper from the edition of In Focus that examines the potential of efforts to improve the economic circumstances of youth to help stem the spread of HIV/AIDS. The paper holds that two decades into the epidemic, the face of the victims of HIV/AIDS in the developing world is increasingly: the poor and young. Further, those working to prevent its spread and mitigate its impact increasingly recognise the links between HIV/AIDS, youth, and poverty. The paper argues that they struggle with how best to address the economic factors driving the epidemic. The paper can be obtained from www.pathfind.org/IN20%FOCUS/jan_2001.htm.

HIV/AIDS and Rural Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa. By Joanna White and Elizabeth Robinson. Social Sciences Department, Natural Resources Institute (NIR). 2000. This research paper brings together literature on HIV/AIDS with literature on sustainable livelihood approaches to look at the broader impacts and possible responses to the AIDS epidemic. In particular it reflects on the need for more community level and cross-sectoral analysis to better target poverty alleviation programmes seeking to tackle HIV/AIDS. The paper also provides helpful contacts to organisations working on HIV/AIDS and livelihoods. The paper can be obtained from www.livelihoods.org/cgi-bin/dbtcgi.exe.

SL activities/programmes

1. The University of Natal is hosting the 5th HEARD HIV/AIDS workshop, October 28 to November 15, 2002. The Workshop theme is 'Planning for HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa'. This Workshop is one of a series of International Policy Research Workshops held over the last eleven years in the UK, East Asia and Africa, the 5th HEARD HIV/AIDS workshop focuses on the need to anticipate the medium and long-term social and economic consequences of HIV/AIDS. For more information contact Madeline Freeman at freeman@nu.ac.za or +27 (0) 31 260 2592
2. As part of the Community-based Planning Project (highlighted in earlier editions), a workshop will be held in Uganda to share experiences with and learnings from piloting the Community-based Planning project. Workshop participants include senior government officials, political figures and NGO staff from South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Uganda. The workshop will be held on 30 June – 11 July 2002. For more information contact Ian Goldman at goldman@khanya-mrc.co.za
3. Khanya-Managing Rural Change, HSRC, Setplan and Paradigm are conducting a participatory poverty assessment study for the Karoo District Municipality with a view to develop a poverty eradication framework. For more information contact Joe Marumo at moscow@khanya-mrc.co.za or Adeline Squire at adeline@intekom.co.za.
4. Khanya are conducting Sustainable Livelihoods training in Tanzania. For more information contact James Carnegie at james@khanya-mrc.co.za.

Useful Internet resources on HIV/AIDS

1. UNAIDS – www.unaids.org
2. SDdimensions www.fao.org/sd
3. European Union HIV/AIDS Programme in Developing Countries. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/aids>
4. AIDS Information Dissemination Site, Southern Africa. <http://www2.wn.apc.org/sahivaids>
5. HEARD – <http://www.und.ac.za/und/heard/publications/publications.htm>
6. HIV & Agriculture Brief <http://www.und.ac.za/und/heard/toolkits/Agriculture.pdf>
7. HIV/AIDS & Labour <http://www.und.ac.za/und/heard/toolkits/Labour.pdf>
8. HIV/AIDS & Subsistence Agriculture <http://www.und.ac.za/und/heard/AidsBriefs/sec/SubsistAgric.pdf>
9. UNDP - <http://www.undp.org/sl/Documents/documents.htm>
10. The UNDP HIV and Development Programme – <http://www.undp.org/hiv>
11. AEGIS. <http://www.aegis.org>
12. ELDIS. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/eldis>

Other News

As part of the Community-based Planning Project (highlighted in earlier editions), Khanya took a delegation of government officials and NGO representatives from SA, Ghana and Uganda on a tour to Bolivia to study Bolivia's system of community participation in planning. Note: many additional

resources have been added to the community-based planning page on the Khanya website at www.khanya-mrc.co.za.

Future topics

We welcome feedback, ideas and contributions for upcoming topics. The topic for July will be on local economic development and for August on Community-based Natural Resource Management (in partnership with PLAAS).

Sustaining Livelihoods in Southern Africa is an initiative of Khanya-managing rural change, PLAAS of the University of the Western CAPE, and CARE. The editor is Tsiliso Tamasane and he can be contacted at tsiliso@khanya-mrc.co.za, tel 082 499 5497. Previous newsletters are available at the Khanya website, www.khanya-mrc.co.za. We welcome contributions, of events, relevant documents, comments etc.
