



## HIV/AIDS and the forest sector



In the forest sector there are three clear interfaces with the HIV/AIDS pandemic:

- the role of trees, natural woodlands, forests and agroforestry in production systems severely affected by HIV /AIDS;
- deaths in the cadre of foresters, including all skilled labourers, tree fellers, machine drivers, mechanics, foremen, etc.;
- transfer of knowledge to the next generation.



Natural miombo woodlands and farmlands, southern Africa. Such resources can be vital to the health and survival of communities affected by the AIDS pandemic. (Photo: C. Holding Anyonge)

FAO recognizes that the most important issue is to deal with the medical and health emergencies created by the HIV/AIDS pandemic through creation of public awareness programmes aimed at preventing further spread of the disease. Although this aspect of HIV/AIDS mitigation is outside the scope of agriculture and forestry departments, all sectors of society have a role in assisting and planning for the alleviation of the impact of this disease, both in the immediate and longer term.

The mandate of FAO is to address food security and poverty alleviation. The HIV/AIDS pandemic cuts right to the core of this mandate, particularly on the African continent. The FAO Forestry Department is therefore well placed to contribute to the mitigation of HIV/AIDS in the forest sector. Mitigation and response should be considered at national (strategic policy and planning), institutional (forestry department staff and workers; tertiary education; research and extension services) and local (villages and households) levels.

The forest sector can have a role in mitigating the impact of AIDS in the following ways:

- by enhancing **short-term agricultural productivity**;
- by enhancing **longer-term agricultural productivity**;
- developing education and human resource development strategies in extension and forest services (**forestry training and education**);
- through **transfer of skills** from one generation to the next;
- by carrying out **outlook studies** on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the forest sector and develop policy and decision support tools.

More detailed information can be found on the Forestry Department's HIV/AIDS Web site at:

[www.fao.org/forestry/hiv-aids](http://www.fao.org/forestry/hiv-aids)

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## The HIV/AIDS crisis



In the last two decades acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) has killed more than 20 million people worldwide. By 2020, another 68 million face premature death in the 45 most affected countries. In 1990 there were a total of 27 million reported human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/AIDS cases. Of these, 7 million or 25 percent were in Africa. In two decades the number of cases in Africa had risen to 25.3 million or 70 percent of the world's HIV/AIDS infected population. AIDS makes development recovery, let alone progress, inestimably more difficult. By robbing communities and nations of their greatest wealth – their people – AIDS weakens the human and institutional capacities that fuel sustainable development. By draining human resources, the epidemic distorts labour markets, disrupts production and consumption, and ultimately diminishes national wealth. HIV/AIDS reduces the capacity of households, communities, institutions and nations to cope with the socio-economic effects of the epidemic.

FAO has recognized that the agriculture output of household based farming – vital to food security in any developing country – cannot be sustained if AIDS continues unchecked. Reduced labour availability leads to a reduction in the land area cultivated, changes in crop patterns, poor timing of cropping operations and declines in yields. Maintenance work such as drainage and fencing is abandoned and long-term sustainability affected. Extension workers and other staff fall ill, and a consequent breakdown in agricultural support services exacerbates the problem. Reduced security of land tenure of affected households, migration patterns driven by the epidemic and reduction in the formal and informal training of children all serve to aggravate a downward spiral. The food emergencies sweeping through southern Africa highlight how vulnerable many countries are to shocks that disrupt food production and consumption. Where availability or affordable access to food is lacking, the prevalence of HIV is also alarmingly high. This unfolding tragedy underlines the need to tackle rural development, food security and agriculture policies in concert with fighting the AIDS epidemic.



Roadside public campaign poster, Malawi. (Photo: S. Kolberg)

The agricultural and natural resources sectors can be developed in such a way as to increase the resilience of rural populations and contribute significantly to HIV prevention. Besides the current health based strategies in combating HIV/AIDS, multisectoral development based strategies, in particular agriculture and natural resource responses, can play an innovative and essential role in controlling epidemics. Although the problem is most acute in southern Africa, the burgeoning influence of this pandemic will necessitate action across several regions.

Efforts to mobilize agricultural, forestry and agroforestry institutions, both public and private, are essential in the face of the present HIV/AIDS pandemic.

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