

**Special Relief Operations Service (TCOR) - Population Programme Service (SDWP)
Nutrition Programmes Service (ESNP)**

**AIDS epidemic as a disaster which requires a response of an
emergency nature**

New challenges for FAO's emergency response in Sub-Saharan Africa

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1. Overview

In many rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, where food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability are endemic problems, the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic is resulting in a serious development crisis. Above a certain threshold, this epidemic can trigger or lead to emergency situations, particularly in conditions of high environmental risks and social vulnerability. The scale, systemic impacts, and cumulative effects of the AIDS epidemic in poor rural communities may produce acute waves of food insecurity and cause rural collapse. Accordingly, there is a need to investigate whether FAO could regard extreme levels of AIDS prevalence as a disaster which requires a response of an emergency nature.

2. AIDS epidemic and rural development crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa

The AIDS epidemic is not just a world-wide public health problem. In some regions, particularly in rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, it has serious development implications. In highly affected households and communities, the AIDS epidemic aggravates food insecurity and dislocates rural livelihoods to the extreme.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 70% of HIV/AIDS cases in the world, amounting up to over 25 million people (UNAIDS, 2000). In Sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS expansion merges with endemic poverty, with the world's greatest depth of food insecurity (FAO, 2000a), and with widespread environmental risks such as drought and with ongoing major complex emergencies due to civil conflict. The AIDS epidemic exacerbates existing development problems through its catalytic effect and its systemic impact on vulnerable rural livelihoods (FAO, 2000b; Topouzis, 1998). In particular, the AIDS epidemic reduces labour availability, disrupts farming practices, increases livelihood vulnerability, expands food insecurity, and further impoverishes rural people (Barnett and Haslwimmer, 1995; du Guerny, 1999). Households and communities with high incidence of AIDS often become more exposed to existing environmental risks and social vulnerability. In this sense, any adversity such as a drought or market fluctuations are likely to have a greater impact over those households and communities affected by the AIDS epidemic. Gender inequalities are exacerbated, leaving women more vulnerable and powerless.

Moreover, the systemic impact of the AIDS epidemic on the rural society causes a wide dislocation of households and communities. Over time, it generates the loss of agricultural capital because land and livestock are sold to face increased poverty and health care needs of infected people. Indigenous knowledge systems and agricultural genetic diversity may also be eroded as a function of the breakdown of the rural social structure. Grassroot responses are not always sufficient, and may impair long-term development. An example would be that of withdrawing children from school as a coping strategy (Mutangadura et al., 1999). In addition, the "silence" surrounding the AIDS epidemic forces a neglect over the deterioration of livelihoods and communities, preventing appropriate action and resulting in irreversible situations. The AIDS epidemic constitutes an unprecedented type of hazard, with unique impacts in poor rural societies in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this region, high levels of AIDS epidemic encompasses serious processes such as:

- Exponential spreading of HIV/AIDS as function of lack of information, poor prevention programmes, and gender inequalities (women's vulnerability and powerlessness).

- Disproportionate killing and affection over adults (the sector with greatest working, productive, and parenthood roles).
- Erosion of the agricultural labour system: some research suggests that the death of a person affected by HIV/AIDS entails the loss of two person-years of labour (Rugalema, 1999).
- Irreversible health impoverishment of affected people, particularly among the rural poor that cannot access palliative health care measures.
- Vastly increasing number of ill-health people, deaths, female-headed households, orphans, and orphan-headed households.
- Sudden and acute demographic asymmetries.
- Devastating impacts in certain households because of intra-household transmission, generating clusters of high HIV prevalence inside communities.
- Systemic impact and cumulative effects, disrupting agriculture, aggravating food insecurity, and exacerbating poverty.
- Disruption of social reproduction systems, such as erosion of indigenous knowledge transfer modes and breaking of community safety mechanisms.
- Disruption of support and social services due in particular to loss in human resources.
- Breakdown of the local economy through disruption of marketing systems and collapse of commercial enterprises.

These distinctive aspects of the AIDS epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa generate unprecedented and complex rural scenarios. Above certain AIDS threshold, rural communities may even collapse, especially in the view of the cumulative and exacerbating effects of the AIDS epidemic. Adult HIV prevalence rates over 15% have been considered to result in severe disruption in rural communities (DFID-IFPRI, 2001). In addition, the AIDS epidemic creates highly vulnerable and impoverished groups, including women (because of their vulnerability and powerlessness), households that concentrate high AIDS prevalence, and orphans. The silence that surrounds the AIDS epidemic, from people to governments, inhibits adequate action and hinders problems till they reach a certain irreversible degree.

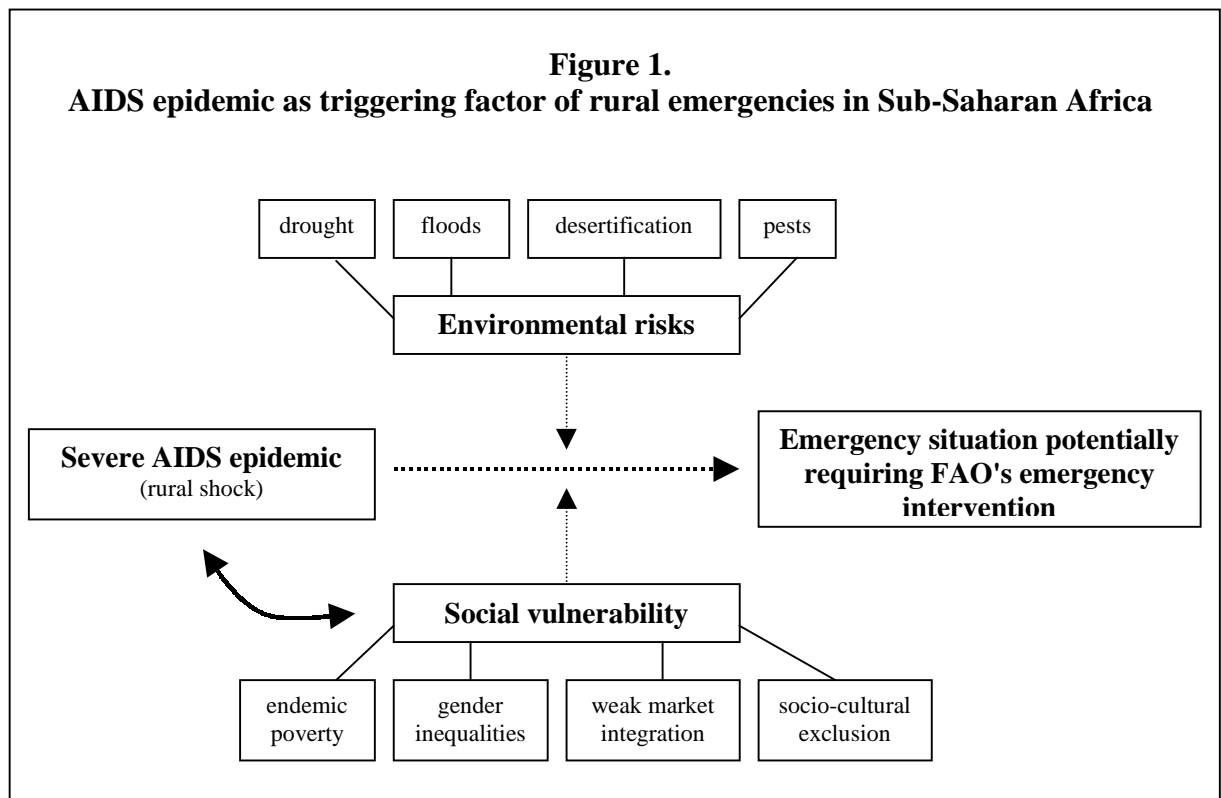
3. The AIDS epidemic as a rural emergency

Emergencies are extreme situations that threaten human life and well-being. Natural disasters (such as droughts, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, cyclones, fires, etc) and “man-made” disasters (such as civil strife, internal conflict and war) can both deteriorate food security and rural livelihoods to such extreme that immediate, appropriate and extraordinary action is required. Through its Special Relief Operations Service, FAO currently provides agricultural assistance to affected communities and contributes to restoring food security and early rehabilitation of rural livelihood systems.

In the view of its growing magnitude in Sub-Saharan Africa, the AIDS epidemic could be also considered as a hazardous process which may cause an emergency situation, with a severe impact on rural livelihoods that requires a response of an emergency nature. In fact, in some rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, the AIDS epidemic can be characterised as a shock, with unprecedented and cumulative impacts over poor people (White and Robinson, 2000). The magnitude of the AIDS epidemic in some rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa compels FAO to address critical questions, such as :

- Above a certain threshold, could the AIDS epidemic turn into a situation of emergency, particularly under certain social and environmental conditions?
- Could FAO incorporate severe AIDS epidemic as a type of emergency hazard?
- Could FAO intervene accordingly?
- Does FAO have any role to play in cases of extreme AIDS epidemic, in terms of emergency prevention, emergency preparedness and response including agricultural relief for highly affected households and communities, and rural reconstruction?

In substance, there is a need to evaluate whether FAO should regard extreme AIDS epidemic prevalence as an emergency situation in itself, necessitating the mobilisation of agricultural relief efforts and rural rehabilitation activities to protect and promote food security at household, community and local level. There is need to identify the AIDS epidemic threshold above which any community faces serious damage over its agricultural and rural dynamics, thus requiring immediate, appropriate and extraordinary measures for emergency prevention or as emergency response. The environmental and social conditions of rural communities highly affected by the AIDS epidemic are also relevant variables to consider. In general, the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly as it interacts with increasing social vulnerability and existing environmental risks, can trigger or lead to rural emergency situations which would be characterised by acute food insecurity and high risk of rural collapse (Figure 1). FAO being the specialised UN agency mandated for food security and rural development is confronted by the AIDS epidemic as a major source of rural development crisis.



The rural scenarios that arise as consequence of the severe AIDS epidemic require adequate study as they are potentially relevant for FAO's emergency intervention to restore food security

and rural systems rehabilitation. Components to explore include prevention, mitigation and rehabilitation activities as appropriate,. The Committee of Security recommended in 2000 that FIVIMS incorporate HIV/AIDS aspects. There is need to explore the relevance of integrating AIDS demographic and geographical information in early warning systems on food and agriculture. The implementation of agricultural and rural activities to prevent food insecurity and livelihood crisis in the view of high AIDS incidence is also critical. Such activities may include crop diversification, empowerment of poor women who have to deal with the AIDS epidemic in their households, farming systems oriented to ensure balanced nutrition, maintenance of agricultural capital, and promotion of adequate grassroots responses to the AIDS epidemic. The identification and support of vulnerable groups is a relevant task because the AIDS epidemic generates exclusion and aggravates vulnerability. Poor women, orphans, and child-headed houses are relevant vulnerable groups to AIDS impact and thus require priority attention and efforts. Finally, emergency interventions aiming at launching rural reconstruction may require consideration since in some cases the AIDS epidemic may dislocate agricultural systems and rural livelihoods to the extreme. FAO's interventions may serve to mitigate acute food and livelihood insecurity, to avoid rural collapse, and to prevent the occurrence of further emergencies due to the high vulnerability caused by the AIDS epidemics.

4. Further research

The condition of extreme AIDS prevalence in rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa as an emergency situation requires further research, based on field studies. It is suggested that field research be conducted in one or two rural areas/countries with high HIV incidence (>15% adult HIV prevalence), integrating environmental risk, being a major dimension of rural livelihoods.

In particular, one casestudy should include dryland communities, considering that drought risk is a widespread constraint in many rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa. In order to ensure the relevance and follow-up of the field research, the study will be carried out in areas where FAO is presently operating. Preference could be given to projects with a strong people-centred approach. UNAIDS and other relevant partner institutions will be consulted.

Field research in selected rural areas will provide an understanding of requirements in terms of prevention and preparedness and also in terms of immediate response, as follows:

A) Emergency prevention and preparedness:

- Identification of potential components for emergency prevention and preparedness in the view of the rural development implications of AIDS epidemic.
- Integration of demographic and geographic data on AIDS epidemic in early warning systems on food security and agriculture.
- Identification of existing projects and grassroots responses relevant to cope with the food and livelihood insecurity resulting from the AIDS epidemic.
- Identification of main agricultural and rural concerns of households and communities in the view of AIDS expansion.
- Identification of vulnerability to food security in the view of AIDS expansion, including highly affected groups (e.g. women, orphans) as priority targets for emergency prevention and response.

- Estimation of the AIDS threshold above which a community faces irreversible rural disruption and extreme risks of acute food and livelihood insecurity.

B) Emergency intervention:

- Impact and immediate needs assessment.
- Examination of relevant components of agricultural relief: e.g. access to land, recovery of livestock.
- Examination of critical activities of rural rehabilitation in the context of high AIDS prevalence, including crop diversification, low-intensity and low-risk agricultural systems, and community strategies.
- Identification of priority groups in the view of high vulnerability to AIDS epidemic, such as poor women and children-headed households.

The expected outcome of this study will be a report including:

1. Analysis of rural emergency scenarios resulting from extreme AIDS epidemic prevalence (e.g. HIV adult prevalence > 15%), integrating environmental risks and social vulnerability factors.
2. Elaboration of guidelines and indicators conducive to consider high AIDS prevalence in rural areas as a situation subject to FAO's emergency prevention activities, including the integration of AIDS epidemic data in early warning systems on food and agriculture, and the assessment of conditions potentially requiring emergency intervention.
3. Identification of potential areas of intervention for FAO's emergency response in rural areas highly affected by the AIDS epidemic, aiming at alleviating the impact of AIDS on food and livelihood security.

5. Conclusions

The rampant expansion of the AIDS epidemic across some rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa merges with environmental risks and social vulnerability, generating a highly critical rural scenario. Acute food insecurity and rural collapse threaten many households and communities. Accordingly, FAO's emergency service needs to consider these rising scenarios as potential emergency situations requiring a response of an emergency nature.

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Internet resource centres

- FAO - FAO's Focal Point for HIV/AIDS: <http://www.fao.org>
- UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS): <http://www.unaids.org>
- UNAIDS Best Practice Collection: <http://www.unaids.org/bestpractice/collection/index.html>
- The World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org/aids>

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TERMS OF REFERENCE A STUDY EXAMINING THE AIDS EPIDEMIC AS A RURAL EMERGENCY SITUATION OF RELEVANCE TO FAO

Title: AIDS epidemic as a rural emergency in Sub-Saharan Africa

Background:

In many rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, where food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability are endemic problems, the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic is resulting in a serious development crisis. There is need to investigate whether there is a threshold range of HIV/AIDS prevalence that, once exceeded, causes acute food insecurity and leads irreversibly to rural collapse, dismantling the local capacity to cope with the situation. In addition, environmental risks and social vulnerability are factors to be considered in assessing the severity of AIDS epidemic in rural areas. The overall agricultural and rural impacts of the AIDS epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa may constitute an emergency situation, potentially warranting FAO's emergency intervention.

Objectives:

- Investigate the catastrophic impacts of extreme AIDS epidemic in rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Analyse the potential consideration of extreme AIDS epidemic as a type of rural emergency in the view of cumulative risks of acute food insecurity and rural collapse.
- Estimate the potential threshold of HIV/AIDS prevalence that may lead to rural collapse and emergency situations, including the consideration of environmental and social variables.

The outcome will be a paper analysing and discussing all these key issues, providing FAO and its emergency service with guidelines and policy recommendations to address AIDS epidemic as a potential emergency situation. The underlying objective is to assess the potential inclusion of extreme AIDS epidemic in FAO's emergency portfolio, particularly for rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Activities:

1. Field research design and preparation: The identification of rural areas for field research will be conducted on the basis of consultation with FAO and UNAIDS, so to ensure that the identified rural areas are of most relevance for the study at the time of conducting field research. Field research in two different rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa with high prevalence of HIV/AIDS (> 15% adult HIV prevalence). Both case studies may preferably reflect different conditions, in social, cultural, environmental, and/or economic terms. One case-study will specifically comprise an area under high environmental risk, particularly under severe drought risk as this is a widespread environmental constraint in Sub-Saharan Africa. Both case-studies should be thus designed to provide a comparative framework to analyse the AIDS epidemic as a rural emergency, and how such a potential emergency interrelates with environmental constraints and endemic poverty. Both case-studies may be located in the same country. Potential countries for field research include Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia, because there is a high HIV prevalence, there is an expanding rural crisis, and FAO could provide adequate support.

2. Field research in two different rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa with high prevalence of HIV/AIDS (> 15% adult HIV prevalence). Field research will comprise interviews, including FAO, UNAIDS thematic group, international agencies, centres of expertise, governmental bodies, relevant non-governmental projects, community leaders, grassroots associations and initiatives, and households severely affected by the AIDS epidemic. The field research will have a community focus, destining a large part of time of work at the grassroots level.
3. Elaboration of a paper discussing the AIDS epidemic as a rural emergency, including:
 - a) Analysis of the devastating impacts of extreme AIDS epidemic in rural areas.
 - b) Categorisation and description of the AIDS epidemic as a rural emergency from the perspective of FAO's emergency service (TCOR), including possible disastrous effects, exacerbating factors, and potential emergency response.
 - c) Estimation of the HIV/AIDS threshold above a community faces high risk of rural collapse, therefore revealing an emergency situation. Levels of environmental risk will be adequately integrated.
 - d) Elaboration of a set of indicators to assess pre-emergency and emergency situations in the context of extreme AIDS epidemic, including environmental and social parameters.
 - e) Analysis of potential pre-emergency components in the view of extreme AIDS epidemic, such as prevention, preparedness, and adequate early warning systems.
 - f) Identification of potential activities of FAO's emergency interventions in rural areas highly impacted by the AIDS epidemic.

Publication and dissemination activities.