

MEETING FOOD AND NUTRITION NEEDS



As HIV/AIDS rates continue to increase around the world, the disease is having an escalating impact on food security and nutrition. When HIV strikes a household and people become ill, the family's ability to work, to feed itself and to provide adequate care are immediately affected. As the disease progresses in individuals, the resources of HIV/AIDS-affected families are often drained as they sell assets to pay for food and medical expenses. Malnutrition, food insecurity and poverty advance.

Food insecurity and malnutrition are particularly serious concerns for the millions of AIDS orphans left without extended family. They cannot produce their own food or earn income now, and most probably will not be able to do so in the future since they lack basic education and agricultural skills. They also add an increasing burden on foster families and existing community support systems.

Food insecurity and a lack of caring capacity within households lead to malnutrition, which can aggravate and accelerate the development of AIDS. Likewise, the disease itself can cause malnutrition: energy requirements are increased in people living with HIV/AIDS; they often lose their appetite; and many experience difficulty eating and absorbing nutrients. The virus also weakens the immune system, making the body more susceptible to other infections and diseases. If drugs to treat HIV and related infections are available, they can also interfere with nutrition in some patients.

Good nutrition cannot cure HIV/AIDS, but it can bolster the immune system and therefore postpone the onset of the disease and help HIV-infected people lead longer, healthier, more productive lives.

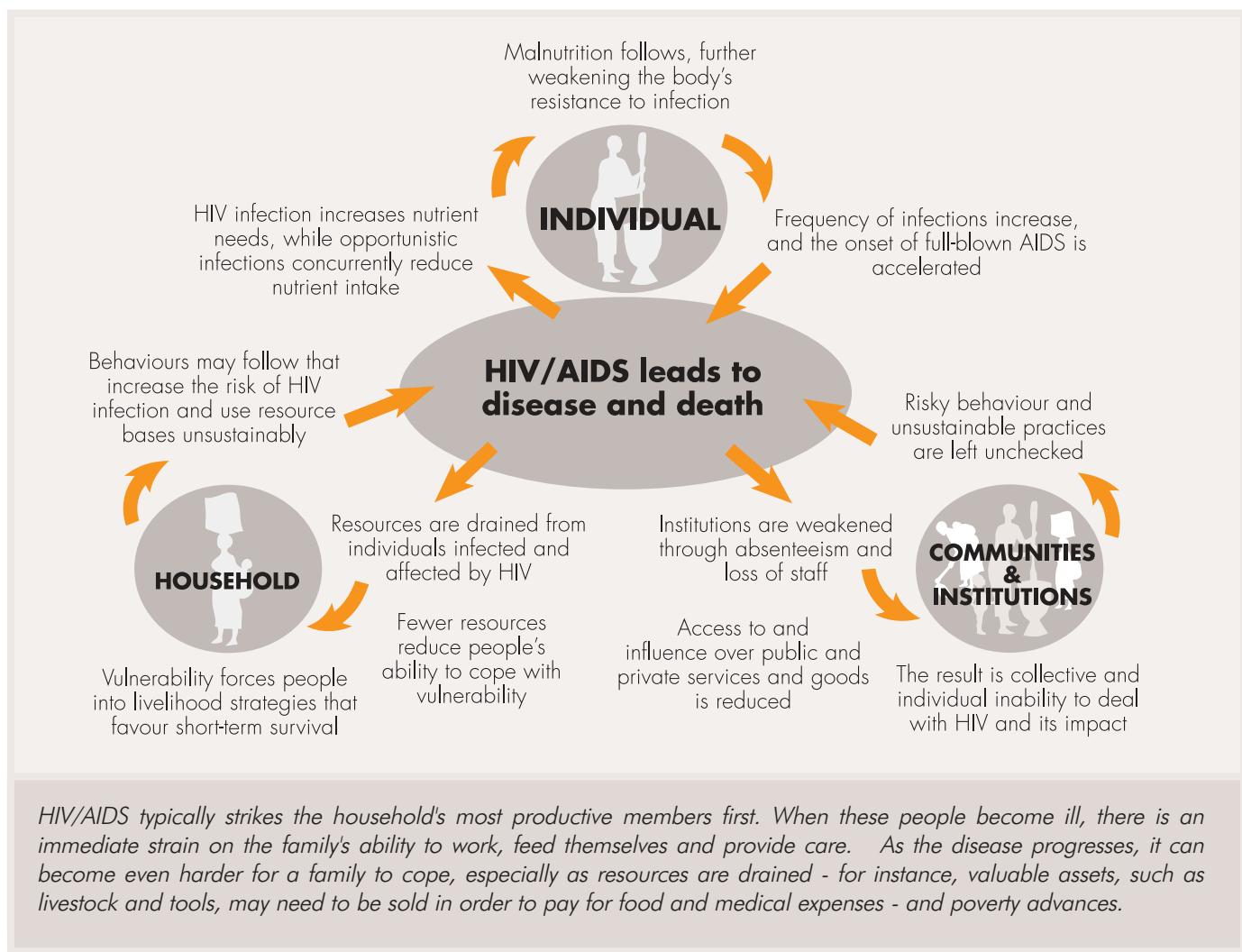
To promote food security and nutrition in HIV/AIDS-affected households, FAO is undertaking the following actions and activities:

CREATING AWARENESS, GENERATING HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND BUILDING CONSENSUS FOR ACTION

To break the vicious cycle of HIV/AIDS, food insecurity and malnutrition, FAO is raising awareness among policy-makers, programme planners and development specialists at all levels of the linkages between HIV/AIDS, food insecurity and malnutrition and generating commitment to systematically incorporate:

- HIV/AIDS considerations and objectives into existing food security policies and programmes; and
- nutrition and food security objectives and considerations into HIV/AIDS policies and programmes.

To this end, FAO has produced a range of materials, including "Guidelines for incorporating HIV/AIDS objectives and considerations in food security and livelihoods programmes" and a documentary on the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security in southern Africa "Sowing Seeds of Hunger". The guidelines provide information on preventing undertakings that can increase the magnitude of undernutrition and HIV/AIDS, and offer strategies and advocacy tools for policy-makers and programme planners. The film was co-produced with Television Trust for the Environment and broadcast on BBC World in over 200 countries and territories around the world. The documentary is now also available and being used as an advocacy tool in national and local workshops and sensitisation campaigns with anticipated broadcasts on various national television networks.



FAO is convening multisectoral advocacy and planning workshops that bring stakeholders and institutions together to explore the various impacts of HIV/AIDS on society and how to best protect and promote health and nutritional well-being of all persons affected by HIV/AIDS -- both now and in the future. Special attention is also given to meet the needs of both those infected by HIV and those living in its wake of destruction. While such workshops have been held at project level, e.g. in Zambia and Mozambique, further workshops are required at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels.

PROVIDING NUTRITIONAL CARE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

In view of the beneficial impact of good nutrition on quality of life and life expectancy of people living with HIV/AIDS, FAO has embarked on a range of programmes that enhance access to and consumption of a nutritionally adequate diet, in quantity and quality. While generic materials are being developed, more specific programmes are ongoing in Mozambique and Zambia addressing:

Household food security. In rural areas, this often includes home and community gardening and other agricultural interventions that can produce the required variety and quantity of food in a cost-effective way.

Food assistance. Given that when full-blown AIDS develops households are often drained of their productive resources, local food banks and external food aid may be required when families can no longer cater for their own needs.

Nutrition education and communication. Adequate care and feeding practices also depend on information delivered through existing community and home-based care organizations, as well as through the media including, rural radio. FAO has developed with WHO a manual entitled, "Living Well with HIV/AIDS: a manual on nutritional care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS." Development of communication and education programmes and related training are ongoing in this area.

Training. Local health and other community workers are being trained to promote better care and feeding practices within HIV-affected households. A complementary training guide for community care providers is being developed with WHO.

PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING THE LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY OF HIV/AIDS AFFECTED HOUSEHOLDS

Nutrition and household food security projects, as implemented in Mozambique and Zambia, provide a mix of interventions, including the use of food aid when needed, to assist households affected by HIV/AIDS. This includes support to food production and diversification, introduction of labour and time saving approaches, promotion of income generation or protection of productive assets. The mix of interventions employed depends on the needs of the households. For example, orphan- and elderly-headed households often need more direct support and aid; female-headed households may need assured access to increased means of production; and orphan fostering and male-headed households may benefit from enhanced access to micro-finance and other agricultural inputs.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-BASED LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT AND CARE SYSTEMS

Given that care and support to HIV/AIDS-affected households are largely dependent on community-based organizations, FAO field projects are involved in strengthening organizational capacity of community care systems, and where such mechanisms do not exist, their establishment is promoted. Field projects, like the Mansa Orphanage project in Zambia, are involved in strengthening the physical capacity of local care organizations (mutual help groups and orphanages in urban areas) to produce and/or acquire food and to provide nutritional care and support. In view of the high turnover of community volunteers, locally adapted training programmes on nutritional care and food assistance to people living with or otherwise affected by HIV/AIDS are being established.

ENSURING ACCESS OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN TO EDUCATION, LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING SO AS TO ENSURE THEIR FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN THE LONG TERM

HI/V/AIDS orphans live in a vicious circle of food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and lack of care and education, resulting in malnutrition and high mortality. To break this circle, large-scale multi-sectoral efforts are required. In southern Africa, the problem is on a massive scale and it can be expected that without adequate policies and programmes, and without global efforts, the coming years will see similar widespread crises in other high HIV-prevalence countries and regions.

In addition to FAO's ongoing work in Zambia and Mozambique that include support to orphans and vulnerable children, FAO and UNICEF have begun a global programme for assisting orphans and HIV/AIDS affected children with the first phase in Lesotho and Malawi. The project seeks to strengthen the capacity of families, communities, community-based organizations and relevant institutions at local, district and national levels to be more effective in protecting and improving livelihoods, food and nutrition security and education of orphans and HIV/AIDS-affected children, their families and their communities in both the near and long term. Models and methods for taking multisectoral action for supporting HIV/AIDS-affected preschool and school-aged children, both of infected individuals as well as of their family and community, will be demonstrated and made available to relevant stakeholders. Additional resources for the expansion of such activities to other countries and to other districts in a second phase will be actively sought.

One of the goals of these projects is to enhance the participation of orphans and vulnerable children in basic education. This will be achieved through school feeding and other incentive programmes. In addition, nutrition education will be included in the curriculum and teacher training.

However, in reality, many orphans and vulnerable children are unable to attend school, even where incentive programmes exist, and those who do attend school may not be able to do so beyond primary levels. It is therefore essential to provide education and training opportunities through both formal and informal education channels thereby providing long-term life-skills and vocational education, including education in nutrition, food and agriculture.

The project will serve as a start-up phase of a multisectoral action programme to promote the implementation of an inter-country, inter-agency and multi-donor response to the emerging crisis affecting children in HIV/AIDS-affected countries. The lessons learned from this project in terms of feasibility, replicability, and coverage will be widely disseminated and used to advocate for broader action and resource mobilization at all levels. A follow-up project proposal will be prepared for the expansion and replication of activities to a larger number of districts and countries from southern Africa (including Swaziland and Zambia) as well as for other regions as part of a second phase.

MEETING ORPHANS' NUTRITION NEEDS - TODAY AND TOMORROW

In northern Zambia's Mansa Township, where growing numbers of AIDS orphans are struggling to survive, residents are rising to that challenge with the help of FAO's TeleFood initiative.

To give the children a home, Mansa's Seventh-day Adventist church opened a small orphanage with donations and support from congregation members, the local Rotary Club and the Zambian Government.

With a roof over the children's heads, project organizers next tackled the question of meeting the orphans' food needs. They wanted to establish a half-hectare garden on the orphanage site that would be cultivated by the children themselves under the supervision of a qualified volunteer gardener. In this way, the children would not only enjoy a healthy diet thanks to the food they produced, but would also acquire valuable vocational skills in the process.

A small grant from TeleFood gave the project the boost it needed. The one-time investment bought seeds and other planting materials, tools such as hoes, wheelbarrows and shovels, fertilizers and a simple, small-scale drip irrigation system. Now, under the careful tending of the children, the garden is flourishing, producing cabbage, eggplants, peas, green peppers, soybeans, sweet potatoes and tomatoes. Thanks to a donation from the Rotary Club, the orphanage also acquired a one-hectare plot in a nearby village, which is being used for maize production, and maintains a small poultry coop. They are producing enough surplus to sell at market, and are taking those proceeds and reinvesting them in the garden. The project is now virtually self-sufficient. By working together to provide for themselves, the children are acquiring teamwork skills and farming know-how – assets they can rely on to support themselves for the rest of their lives.

USEFUL REFERENCES

FAO HIV/AIDS programme
<http://www.fao.org/hivaids>

Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security and rural poverty
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/Y8331E/Y8331E00.htm>

HIV/AIDS food security and nutrition
http://www.fao.org/es/ESN/nutrition/household_hivaids_en.stm

Living well with HIV/AIDS
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/Y4168E/Y4168E00.htm>

HIV/AIDS and nutrition, helping families to cope
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/X4390t/x4390t04.htm>