

# STRENGTHENING RURAL INSTITUTIONS



The HIV/AIDS epidemic not only has devastating impacts on agricultural production, but it also reduces the capacity of rural institutions to provide adequate services. Rural institutions fall into two broad categories - formal and informal. Formal institutions are based on 'written rules' and include government ministries and departments, private sector companies, farmer's unions, cooperatives, registered NGOs and other registered community-based organizations. Informal institutions are usually based on 'unwritten' rules of interaction derived from culture, tradition and customary practices. These include traditional institutions such as the extended family system, the kinship system, clans and chieftainships.

In general terms, the HIV/AIDS epidemic strikes negatively on rural development at three levels:

- it weakens the institutional capacity and disrupt the smooth operation of rural institutions through losses in human resources, some of whom may be critical links in the effective functioning of these institutions;
- it drastically alters the target groups of rural development policies and programmes, since increased attention has to be given to the surviving children, adolescents and the elderly, and;
- it impoverishes directly affected households and communities.



## THE IMPACT OF HIV/AIDS ON RURAL INSTITUTIONS – SOME STATISTICS

- In Malawi, it is estimated that at least 16% of the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation are HIV-positive (Topouzis, 1998).
- In Kenya, 58% of staff deaths in the Ministry of Agriculture were reportedly due to AIDS (IFAD, 2001).
- In Uganda, 3 out of 12 staff in a district extension office died of AIDS in one year. In some parts of Uganda, the six-day working week has been reduced as a result of increased mortality and morbidity related to HIV/AIDS (Topouzis, 1998).
- In Zambia, 70% of the agricultural extension staff of a district programme were looking after orphans (IFAD, 2001).

Mitigation strategies to cope with the HIV/AIDS epidemic need to be directed not only to individuals and households, but also to community organizations and institutions.

Several important issues are: how to ensure that the technology developed and promoted by publicly financed agro-research institutions is relevant to the changing needs of rural producers and consumers in the light of the HIV epidemic; how to bring about changes in the technology and culture of organizations; and how to re-align policy, programmes and research with the new needs being generated by the epidemic.

## CREATING LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR RESPONDING TO HIV/AIDS

The Bondo District, one of the poorest districts of Kenya, suffers from chronic and widespread food insecurity – a situation which is exacerbated by a very high HIV prevalence rate. In 2002, as part of district level short-term action plan to enhance food security in light of the HIV/AIDS situation, FAO in co-operation with the Ministry of Agriculture at the district level, developed an institutional model to guide the implementation of community-based food security programmes. This project has provided the Government with a practical model to assist rural communities in addressing institutional issues related to HIV/AIDS, food and agriculture. Other UN and bilateral agencies have been following this process closely, and several are expected to participate in the implementation of the model once the core institutional arrangements are finalised.

## FAO'S RESPONSE

In order for stakeholders to gain a full understanding of the impact that HIV/AIDS is having on rural institutions and the strategies that need to be developed to mitigate these impacts, FAO has undertaken various case studies and analyses of these impacts. FAO has drawn attention to the fact that as the epidemic is creating a crisis of unprecedented proportions among the rural population, it also has serious implications for policy intervention, service delivery, and programme implementation by the institutions that are responsible for providing various services to this population. These analyses have highlighted the urgent need for formal and informal institutions to respond to the challenges posed by the epidemic, by modifying their approaches and methodologies in order to make them relevant to the needs of rural populations.

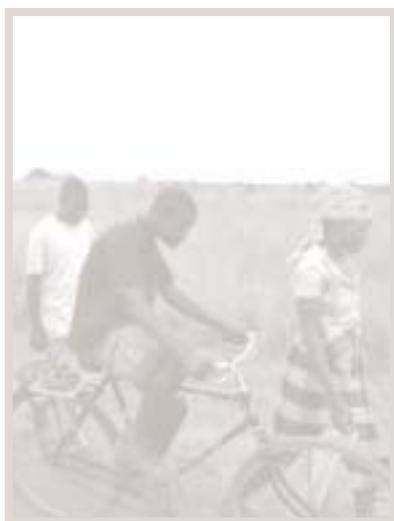
FAO's responses fall under six broad headings:

- Reorienting institutional policy planning
- Reorienting rural extension services
- Adapting research and technology
- Reorienting micro-credit and savings schemes
- Sensitizing land tenure institutions
- Strengthening the support mechanisms of extended families and other informal rural institutions

### REORIENTING INSTITUTIONAL POLICY PLANNING

The existing policies, programmes and production targets were designed to meet the requirements of the 'former' clients and were based on the no-longer valid, assumption that institutions would normally operate at maximum capacity and efficiency, given adequate human resources, to achieve realistic planned targets and outputs. Due to the loss of the various categories of manpower, many agricultural and rural development institutions can no longer achieve their planned programme outputs.

Planning ministries and departments are experiencing delays and disruptions in policy and planning, implementation and delivery of the essential services to farmers and rural households. Without the necessary institutional support services, the agricultural and rural development sectors are failing to realize the forecasted growth rates and planned production targets. Farmers are unable to produce enough food for the nation as well as their own households. This is resulting in serious shortages of food, loss of incomes and it is plunging some regions of the most affected countries into further poverty and food insecurity.



## ADDRESSING THE POLICY AND PROGRAMMING CHALLENGES IN THE FACE OF HIV/AIDS

In 1998, FAO and UNDP prepared a paper on "The Implications of HIV/AIDS for Rural Development Policy and Programming: Focus on Sub-Saharan Africa". This paper examines the implications of the HIV epidemic for rural development policies and programmes in sub-Saharan Africa and, in particular: the inter-relationships between rural development and HIV/AIDS; and the broad policy and programming challenges that the epidemic poses for rural institutions. A conceptual framework was proposed for identifying key policy and programming issues for rural development and guidelines are provided for the design and conduct of case studies to be carried out in southern and eastern Africa.

### REORIENTING RURAL EXTENSION SERVICES

**B**ased on the extension needs of newly emerged clientele such as widows, children and elderly farmers, extension services should make necessary adjustments in their existing strategies, methods and materials. Rural youth should be given special attention due to their potential vulnerability in contracting AIDS. Extension staff need training in HIV/AIDS issues before they can educate the rural population in mitigating the spread of HIV infection. The educational messages on HIV/AIDS should be incorporated into ongoing extension programmes, and their dissemination be supported by mass media, and especially by the community rural radio systems. Extension workers should work in collaboration with the field staff of relevant institutions such as health and population, and rural community development. Special extension programmes should be developed for dealing with rural households affected by the epidemic.

### PREPARING EXTENSION SERVICES TO WORK AGAINST THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS should be integrated into the pre- and in-service training curricula of extension workers. This will facilitate the technical preparation of extension workers and much needed confidence building. When extension workers are sensitive to and knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and its impact on food security, agriculture and rural livelihoods, it is easier for them to discuss with their clients the impact of the epidemic on communities and individuals. FAO's Extension, Education and Communication Service has published "Facing the Challenge of an HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Agricultural Extension Services in sub-Saharan Africa" and a brochure "Equipping Extension Services to Fight against HIV/AIDS", which may be used as a guide for re-orienting agricultural and rural extension services to combat the HIV/AIDS. In Uganda, a guide on mitigating strategies is being developed by the National Agricultural Advisory Services in collaboration with FAO, to be used by field extension workers. In addition, FAO's Global Integrated Pest Management Facility has developed a tool entitled Frequently Asked Questions on HIV/AIDS. This fact list facilitates communications and awareness raising among extension workers and their clients.

### ADAPTING RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

**T**he HIV epidemic has not only affected extension organizations in terms of reduced capacity due to loss of staff, but it has also created new institutional, technical and operational challenges for the organizations. For example, special training sessions, field demonstrations, suitable educational materials and confidence-building measures are needed to improve the agricultural skills of inexperienced young farmers, including larger numbers of women. Meaningful collaboration is needed with agricultural research and farm machinery organizations to develop alternate technologies, farming systems and machinery that require relatively less physical power, less farm labour and different cultural practices.

Changing agronomic practices and cropping patterns as well as different technological requirements of a new clientele such as adolescents and the elderly are posing challenges for agricultural and rural development research. Agricultural research programmes need to address the special needs of farm households with fewer working adults and higher dependency ratios.



## HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR NEW INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

In 2001 FAO undertook studies in Malawi and Zambia on "The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Research and Agricultural Extension Organizations and Field Operations in Selected Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, with Appropriate Institutional Response." These studies highlighted the need for formal and informal institutions to respond to the challenges posed by the epidemic by modifying their approaches and activities in order to make them more relevant to the needs of the rural population while being sensitive to their age, gender, literacy and cultural values.



## REORIENTING MICRO-CREDIT AND SAVINGS SCHEMES

Young children and adolescents have serious limitations in obtaining credit. They are regarded as 'minors', which restricts their legal and moral responsibility for loan repayment since they cannot normally be taken to court and be sued in their own right. In the event of default in loan repayment, credit institutions would be unable to legally enforce loan recovery procedures such as attachments, foreclosures and evictions. Moreover, being 'minors' would also imply that they lack secure property rights, including land ownership, which means they would be unable to provide land as collateral. For these reasons, money lending institutions are unwilling to grant loans to adolescent heads of households.

The viability of rural credit programmes is being seriously undermined, and many households headed by youth, women or elderly people are at risk. The increased mortality and morbidity of able-bodied adults increase the number of defaults in loan repayments by the surviving members of HIV/AIDS affected families.

Credit for agricultural production may be diverted to providing for the medical care of sick relatives, funeral expenses and food. This results in a reduction in crop yields and loss of income, causing the affected families to have difficulties with loan repayments, which may in turn lead to selling off some family assets. In some cases households are forced to sell off productive assets to pay for medical and funeral expenses or their assets may have been disbursed upon the death of the household head.

## SMALL GRANTS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

FAO has been involved in supporting institutional district level arrangements to manage small grants and District Development Funds in Kenya since 2002. The District Development Fund is primarily dispersed to community based organisations to finance small-scale productive investments and infrastructure that are part of community-based development programmes. An important grant eligibility criterion is that investments benefit poorer members of the community, including women and families affected by HIV/AIDS. Grants are provided for up to US\$ 1,000 per community-based organisation.



## SENSITIZING LAND TENURE INSTITUTIONS

Under some patriarchal traditional customary practices, land and other forms of property are often owned and inherited by adult male relatives. This means that in areas of high HIV prevalence there will be a tendency for female adolescents and women to lose their land rights when a husband, father or other legal guardian dies. This may lead to problems associated with weak security of tenure, such as lack of collateral required to qualify for loans from credit institutions. In some land resettlement schemes, women may face eviction upon the divorce from or the death of a husband.

### TRAINING ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

In Namibia, FAO's Integrated Support to Sustainable Development and Food Security (IP) is collaborating with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare and the Legal Assistance Centre to implement a pilot project that addresses asset stripping in Ohangwena Province. The centre has several years of experience in legal litigation regarding property, and the ministry is committed to enforcing the Married Persons Equality Act. This project has been sensitizing and training local leaders and ministry staff, and providing para-legal training for community-based support workers on the use of appropriate materials on the rights of women, orphans and vulnerable children. Training material on property stripping has been adapted to local context. A national advocacy campaign on mitigating property stripping will be launched prior to a national conference on "Property Rights for Women" in May 2004.

Two regional conferences have also been organized:

- Report of the FAO/OXFAM GB workshop on women's land rights in Southern and Eastern Africa (Pretoria, South Africa, 17-19 June 2003)
- FAO/SARPN workshop on HIV/AIDS and land (Pretoria, South Africa, 24-25 June 2002)

### STUDIES ON WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

FAO has also been involved in studies on women's land rights in Uganda, Lesotho, Kenya and South Africa, all of which indicate that dispossession, particularly among AIDS widows, is high. The Land Tenure Service at FAO has been particularly active in looking at land tenure and the legal system. Activities include surveys on HIV/AIDS and land issues in Lesotho, Kenya and South Africa, and a joint DFID/FAO study on HIV/AIDS and land issues in Kenya. A study and video on HIV/AIDS and women's land rights in Uganda has been prepared by EASSI/FAO, and follow-up activities are envisaged.

## STRENGTHENING THE SUPPORT MECHANISMS OF EXTENDED FAMILIES AND OTHER INFORMAL RURAL INSTITUTIONS



In Africa, informal rural institutions have traditionally acted as social safety nets in the absence of national health and social security systems. Extended family and kinship systems protect widows, children and the elderly. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is eroding this safety net, as people of productive ages are dying and the elderly have to support not only themselves but also a number of dependent grandchildren, often in conditions of poverty.

The extended family and kinship systems also fulfill the critical role of child fostering. In many households, this has created considerable pressures as many families cannot cope with the added burden additional children. The implications for the foster children are far-reaching: some are withdrawn from school, others run away, yet others end up as street children in urban centres. While there have been reports of decreased willingness on the part of extended families to foster orphans, and thus of the emergence of children-headed households, more data are needed to substantiate these claims. What is certain is that the extended family and kinship systems are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the burdens placed on them by this traditional social safety net mechanism.

To compensate for the erosion of capacity and increased workload of family networks due to HIV/AIDS, institutions that support HIV/AIDS affected and afflicted individuals and families will need additional material and financial support. At the same time, these institutions will need to focus on effective and low-cost activities. These may include supporting income generation by groups of people living with AIDS, widows or children. Clubs and other social centres for young people play an important role in providing a social network and group support for young people.

### GUIDELINES TO ANALYSE LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

FAO's Rural Institutions and Participation Service (SDAR) has developed *Guidelines for the Analysis of Local Institutions* and is currently testing them in Uganda, Cambodia and Dominican Republic to better understand how local institutions affect and support the lives of the most vulnerable population groups, including those affected by HIV/AIDS. The purpose of the in-depth analysis is to identify entry points for local organizational capacity building in support of the most vulnerable population groups. Activities focus on three dimensions:

- assessing the social capital and institutional resources of the vulnerable;
- adapting existing training/learning methodologies and tools to support vulnerable groups; and
- identifying mechanisms and strategies to promote the involvement of vulnerable people in mainstream development activities that support their livelihood needs.



## RESPONSE OF RURAL INSTITUTIONS TO HIV/AIDS: AN EVALUATION OF FAO'S EXPERIENCE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

An evaluation was recently conducted of FAO's experiences with local institution-building to cope with and adapt to HIV/AIDS in southern Africa.\* The evaluation was conducted for three reasons:

- the magnitude of the challenge to sustainable rural livelihoods posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic;
- the clear need for local institution-building to assist affected households and communities to cope with this growing emergency; and
- the involvement of a number of FAO units in devising strategies to mainstream HIV/AIDS in its field programme activities.

FAO has already piloted an array of initiatives in southern Africa to support HIV/AIDS-affected households and communities. There is now a need to implement these activities on a wider scale, and many of the evaluation's key recommendations provided concrete areas for broadening this scope. They include:

- preparing a global map of HIV-affected areas, indicating the stage that each has reached;
- preparing a case for declaring a humanitarian HIV/AIDS emergency wherever HIV prevalence rates have reached 15 percent or more;
- designing an innovative communications campaign on the role that food security can play in prevention, care and support;
- developing a capacity-building programme for local leaders on institutional innovation to promote sustainable responses to HIV/AIDS;
- supporting vocational training for rural youth;
- strengthening the ability of farmer field schools to adopt conservation agriculture as a labour-saving technology; and
- supporting extension service delivery reforms which focus on establishing district-level service centres where local people can obtain expert advice and training.

As stated in the evaluation, "The adjustments and adaptation that need to be made in the face of the pandemic do not require a search for new and different solutions. Instead, they require a more focused and rigorous application of known best practices. Capacity to apply these known best practices is, however, often lacking at the local level"

\* The evaluation was commissioned by the chair of the FAO Priority Area for Interdisciplinary Action on Local Institution-building to improve Capacity for achieving Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

## 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>

**Sustainable Development Department**  
<http://www.fao.org/sd>

**Participation: resources, field tools and links**  
<http://www.fao.org/participation>

**Implications of HIV/AIDS for rural development policy and programming**  
<http://www.fao.org/sd/wpdirect/wpre0074.htm>

**Addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on Ministries of Agriculture**  
[http://www.fao.org/sd/2003/PE07063\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sd/2003/PE07063_en.htm)