FORESTRY AND AGROFORESTRY IN MULTISECTORAL HIV/AIDS PROGRAMMING

The interfaces between the forest sector and HIV/AIDS can be summarized as:

- the potential of trees, natural woodlands, forests and agroforestry in reducing vulnerability in high-prevalence HIV/AIDS communities and in contributing to resource based livelihoods and coping strategies of HIV/AIDS affected households;
- the impacts on the access to forest and tree resources as well as their use, management and governance;
- the impact on forest product supply and demand in local, national, and regional markets; and
- the loss of labour and expertise among farm families, forest workers and professionals.

It is recognized that effective programming in HIV/AIDS should be conducted horizontally between sectors, and also vertically at several levels within each sector. A variety of strategies and activities are recommended for the consideration of forest policy makers and practitioners. FAO's Forestry Department, in consultation with national forest departments and forest extension service providers, is developing a series of responses to multisectoral HIV/AIDS programming.

ENSURING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROTECTION

To ensure social and economic protection, activities focus on the role of trees, woodlands and forests in providing an economic and social safety net when the opportunities to farm are limited and cash is scarce. Natural woodlands, for example, form an integral part of the livelihood and farming systems of southern Africa. Woodlands are held in a variety of tenurial regimes, including State Forest, co-managed and customary land. Households rely on woodlands to provide income from the sale of non-wood forest products such as mushrooms and wood products such as poles and house construction materials. Fuel wood is collected both for home use and sale. Woodlands are also an important source of traditional medicines. Moreover, households supplement their food supply by collecting wild food plants, bush meat, nuts, leaves and roots. These gathered wild foods are an essential source of micro-nutrients.

HIV/AIDS AND WOODLAND LIVELIHOOD AND COPING STRATEGIES

During an FAO mission in December 2002, it was observed that HIV/AIDS-affected households appeared to be relying more and more on miombo resources as their capacity to farm the land declined. Households not able to crop also relied more on gathering from the woodlands for their daily subsistence needs and for income. In addition, in many villages visited, households had no access to pharmaceutical drugs and relied entirely on the plants and trees occurring naturally on their farmlands and in the woodlands for the treatment of opportunistic infections. It appeared that woodlands were an essential safety net for HIV/AIDS-affected households. As a consequence of this mission a two-country survey was commissioned in southern Africa to determine the uses and varied access to the resource as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The study found that the value of woodland activities as a safety net during periods of adult illness depends on previous livelihood strategies, the gender of the afflicted persons and the type of woodland activity. In phases of morbidity the primary response was to increase collection of medicinal plants. However, woodland-related subsistence activities decreased with adult illness. Households become more dependent on commercial woodland activities and the income generated from forest products to support the household and patient. In cases of mortality, 23% of respondents stated that product collection increased. Collection of wild foods was ranked as the second-most important coping strategy in half of the sites surveyed. Households experiencing a death were five times more likely to have increased collection of firewood as an income-generating activity than unaffected households.

The recommendations and findings of the study will be disseminated through FAO's support to national forest programmes, and will also be used to support countries in the design of technical cooperation programmes.

Source: Kayambazinthu et al, FAO 2004

Access to and ownership of land is a determining factor for the viability of HIV/AIDS affected households. Trees have long been an indicator of tenure in Africa. Trees can secure land but they can also encourage others to grab that portion of land where trees have been planted. Tree-related interventions should be placed within the context of customary land tenure and emerging legal and traditional responses to land tenure issues in each tribal area affected by HIV/AIDS.

Strengthening rural institutions

Through increased information and field experience, it is becoming evident that actions within the forest and environment sector should start with capacity building of local institutions, both formal and informal, to enable them to be co-initiators and thus enhance the likelihood that forest-sector responses are sustainable. These institutions include community natural resource management committees and other established village-level natural resource management mechanisms

The proceedings of an FAO HIV/AIDS seminar held (Harare, 2004) on programming in the forest and environment sectors in southern Africa concluded that a cornerstone of successful HIV/AIDS programming is the capacity of local institutions to demand the services they require and coordinate and manage the services they are offered. The participants recommended that field programmes addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic in rural areas should include a core component supporting local level institutions in combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This support could include leadership training, development of organizational skills and gender and youth awareness programmes.

Community-based Fire Management.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that in areas of high HIV/AIDS prevalence where farm labour is in short supply, households increasingly use fire to clear land. Fires that burn out of control can reduce the range of resources available to families: building materials, commercial products, food and medicines. The safe and environmentally acceptable use of fire as a management tool is another way of reducing the vulnerability of households in areas of HIV/AIDS prevalence.

To strengthen the capabilities in managing wildland fires among forestry and wildlife staff in Africa, FAO, together with the Global Fire Monitoring Center, is training instructors in Community-based Fire Management (CBFiM). One such regional training is scheduled to take place in October 2004 and will serve to sensitize both employers' organizations (e.g. forest departments, wood industry) and local communities in the proper use of fire as a management tool.

Supporting human resource development, technical and tertiary education in forestry

FAO has a comparative advantage in terms of providing support and capacity building to forest research and education establishments and to forest extensions service providers. Capacity building and training of forest department staff in a wide range of subjects that interface with the pandemic are a regular element part of FAOs technical cooperation programmes and support to national forest programmes.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic compounds already existing trends in retrenchment and reduced recruitment of public-sector staff. Government departments, research and education establishments and extension service providers are faced with ever-worsening staff shortages. FAO has taken this into account in its forest education strategy and its support to participatory curriculum development. Through these mechanisms, the particular needs of educational institutions, staff and students can be addressed. Possible responses already under consideration are: supporting tertiary and technical educational institutions through revised education policy and curriculum development; short upgrading courses to address shortfalls in agriculture and forestry staff; providing staff from outside the region for professional posts.

Saving time and labour

Traditional agroforestry systems are diverse. A close analysis of prevailing agroforestry and production systems in areas that are strongly affected by HIV/AIDS reveals several low-labour agroforestry alternatives that would maintain the capital of the soil and the production for the land during a generation of low labour availability.

A primary response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic is reducing the vulnerability of rural households and introducing a wider range of coping strategies. As part of this response, FAO produced a leaflet for forest and agroforestry extension workers. The leaflet was designed to encourage discussion and awareness raising amongst frontline staff on how their daily extension activities could reduce vulnerability and enhance coping strategies for HIV/AIDS-affected households. (The leaflet is entitled: Contribution of trees and forests to the livelihoods of HIV/AIDS affected households http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/data/hiv/HIV-AIDS-EN.pdf)

Examples of specific technologies being promoted in southern Africa in the mitigation of HIV/AIDS include improved fallows, fruit trees and woodlots.

Promoting improved fallows

One agroforestry practice with staggered labour inputs that can contribute to maintaining the longer-term sustainability of agriculture systems is improved fallow. This practice involves deliberately planting or directly sowing nitrogen-fixing species on land that would otherwise be left idle when crop yields decline, and waiting for soil to regain its fertility by the slow process of resting and regeneration. While under fallow, the shrubs will contribute to the supply of fodder and fuelwood near to the homestead within two years of planting. Improved fallows can also assist in securing land tenure of abandoned fields. Improved fallows tend to be suitable for much of southern Africa, where low-input production systems prevail, and where leaving land fallow to regenerate is part of the agriculture rotation. This technology is being disseminated by a range of organizations and service providers in Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi.

Influencing policy

At the policy level, FAO's Forestry Department is actively developing strategies and seeking ways to support the role of forestry and wildlife departments in multisectoral responses to HIV/AIDS.

WORKING AT THE POLICY LEVEL

FAO's forest department has presented articles and briefs on HIV/AIDS in the following policy level publications and briefs:

Forest Outlook Study for Africa published 2002
African Forests: A view to 2020
FAO's National Forest Sector Outlook studies will contribute towards developing policy and decision support tools.

State of the World Forests 2003. A section on HIV/AIDS and the forest sector was included in SOFO 2003
http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/forestry2/index.jsp?siteId=3321&langId=1

COFO exhibit: HIV/AIDS, Forestry and Food Security March 2003
Flyer: http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/data/hiv/ForestryHIV-AIDShandout.pdf

African Forest and Wildlife Commission Accra Ghana Feb 2004. Distribution of discussion flyer:
FAO Forestry: HIV/AIDS and the Forestry and Wildlife sectors; inclusion of HIV/AIDS and the forest sector in the discussion of several sessions Policy flyer: http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/data/hiv/ForestryHIV-AIDS-EN.pdf

USEFUL REFERENCES

FAOs HIV/AIDS and forestry website
www.fao/forestry/hivaids

ICRAF 25th Anniversary conference proceedings:
Keeping agroforestry relevant in situations of HIV/AIDS prevalence
By Marcela Villarreal, Christine Holding Anyonge, Freddie Kwesiga and Brent Swallow

Forthcoming:

Kayambazinthu, D; Sitoe, A; Barany M, and Holding Anyonge C. HIV/AIDS and the miombo woodlands of Mozambique and Malawi: An exploratory study . Synthesis report. FAO Forestry Working Paper

FAO. Understanding the interface between natural woodlands and HIV/AIDS affected communities in southern Africa. Workshop, Harare. FAO Forestry Proceedings