



Introduction

In the previous chapter we looked at ways and means of identifying vulnerable households and assessing the impact HIV/AIDS has had on them. In this chapter, we would like to suggest some possible rural-based responses that could help in reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS on affected men, women and children in rural communities. Before continuing with presenting the suggested responses, it is necessary to think for a few minutes about the realities of people affected by HIV/AIDS. When suggesting any of the responses, we need to understand what is realistic in terms of labour availability (stamina), time, resources and motivation for the vulnerable men, women and children we wish to work with. Often households affected by HIV/AIDS are forced to sell off their assets like livestock or land, and often think it is useless to invest in long-term agricultural activities because they do not see a future for themselves. Such circumstances and the prevailing stigma in the community may often limit their participation in agriculture extension or other community development activities. It is important to remember that the overall purpose of responding to the impacts of HIV/AIDS through extension service is to improve the food security situation, nutrition and livelihood or incomes among HIV/AIDS affected households. Keeping this in mind, we will now highlight possible responses this guide wishes to put forward, while supporting vulnerable community groups affected by HIV/AIDS:

- **Promoting group formation**
- **Promoting labour saving technologies**
- **Promoting rural livelihoods diversification**
- **Improving the nutrition status of households affected by HIV/AIDS.**



Groups formation



In the previous chapter we emphasized the importance of participatory approaches as a basis for understanding the specific impacts of HIV/AIDS on men, women and children in rural households. One of the ways suggested for understanding some of these impacts is to work with existing and potential community groups. If groups have been formed in such a way that encourages participation of members, they should be the way forward for any agreed responses to reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS on vulnerable groups. The following guiding points will help the extension worker and the community to come up with practical and sustainable groups:

- **Work with existing groups**

We can sometimes work with existing groups, in fact it is highly recommended that we do so. It is not always necessary to re-invent the wheel and sometimes if the group already exists it reduces the chance of stigma if affected people are encouraged and allowed to join, or are indeed, already members. This type of group can also include social/kin groups, religious and business networks that have been established in the community for a long time. Groups provide for some of the socio-economic and physiological needs of individuals and households. However, people living with HIV and their households are often stigmatized which can lead to their withdrawal from social groups.

- **Benefits of belonging to groups**

Some of the benefits that men and women can get from being members of a specific group are the following: a group is an easy way of sharing information; raising awareness about the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS; showing people ways of living positively; it offers psycho-social support; and it is easier to link groups than individuals to other organizations if other support is needed.

- **Ensure group participation**

Participation is a key element of group formation, how to ensure participation and who should participate in group activities and what role he/she should play is discussed in details in most of the SEAGA manuals. Reference to these materials is provided in the bibliography at the end

of this chapter. Another source of information is The Group Promoter's Resource Book, a FAO publication that is part of a series. For details of the series please look at the Other Resources section at the end of this chapter.

Through farmers' groups, women and men farmers can discuss the dangers of HIV/AIDS and its impact on agriculture. They can also integrate health issues particularly HIV/AIDS and other primary health care issues like nutrition, immunization, malaria control, environmental sanitation, among others, in their group objectives, making it possible to discuss openly and participate in interventions to mitigate the impacts of HIV/AIDS on agriculture. Groups can also address individual labour shortage and mobilize savings etc.

Jane is a widow living with HIV. She has also lost two of her sons and a daughter due to HIV/AIDS and lives with 6 of her grandchildren. Initially, life was hard for Jane; her grandchildren could not attend school, she lacked food and money for medical care and did not have good skills of how to improve her garden. At one time she thought of selling part of her land, her husband left her to start up a vending business. With the support of an agriculture extension worker from Masaka District, Jane was encouraged to join a women group in Ssenyange community. In the group, Jane was able to appreciate her problems as a widow and a person living with HIV, she restored her hope but most importantly she gained new farming techniques and ideas, through learning from others, that she has since applied to improve her farm.

Today, Jane rears a local cow and its calf and has 3 pigs she keeps in a wooden sty. She sells the pigs to pay school fees for some of her grand children in secondary school. She mulches her banana plantation, which she has intercropped with vanilla and the quality of the bananas has improved. She applies the animal dung to the banana and vanilla plantation. She also has a vegetable garden, that she says helps to supplement nutrition in her home. Jane has enough food now for the family.

What worries Jane now is her weakening condition. She can no longer attend to her garden adequately and to collect feeds for the animals. She hopes that when her vanilla matures she will be able sell it and hire labour to attend to her banana plantation. She continues to participate in her community group and she is the area leader of the women in her locality.

**Example:
The value of joining a community group**

What is a farmers/fishers' group?

A farmers/fishers' group can be composed of two or more men and women farmers/fishers² who come together, interact with each other and work with each other towards the goal of identifying some common agricultural/fishing interests or needs that they can work on together to achieve.

Types of farmers/fishers' groups:

1. Social farmers/fishers' group; formed by men and women farmers/fishers on the basis of shared social interests or needs, for example setting up a village farmer/fishers school, dispensary or farmer/fisher canteen.
2. Economic farmers/fishers' group; formed to improve the economic status and welfare of women and men farmers. Economic groups are aimed at improved production and hopefully at household food security and increased income. The group's common interests or needs could be the idea of improving the welfare of the men and women farmers/fishers in the group, improving agricultural production, fish yield, increasing household food

² Men and women together, or in separate group, according to what is socially acceptable in the community; the important thing here is that the groups are formed with the aim of giving a voice to all members, if it is not possible for women to express their opinions in a mixed group, then they should be encouraged to form a separate one.



production, collective marketing of produce, bulk purchase of agricultural/fishing inputs, establishing or identifying a market center for their goods, a village valley dam, a village farmer/fisher school or dispensary etc.

3. Environmental farmers/fishers' group; formed to protect the environment and ensure that farmers live in a healthy environment. Environmental farmers' groups should increase sustainable management of natural resources.

Figure 4: Benefits of farmer/fisher groups to a farmer/fisher



Working with groups of vulnerable people

The purpose of working with vulnerable groups is to:

- Increase their knowledge and skills in addressing and sharing the problems they are experiencing, some of them being a direct result of HIV/AIDS
- Increase their confidence and belief that they can manage or deal with their own problems
- Allow them to build a more acceptable group image and recognition in the community
- Try and make sure that the groups will be independent enough to continue after the extension worker no longer works so closely with them (sustainability of the self-help groups).

When a community extension worker is promoting the formation of community groups of vulnerable people or trying to ensure their inclusion in existing groups, he or she needs to consider the following processes:

1. Identifying vulnerable groups

In identifying vulnerable households, the extension worker must AVOID directly labeling HIV/AIDS affected households or individuals or groups as this increases stigmatization. Instead, it is useful to identify groups with other factors such as low income or food insecure or less resourced groups³.

2. Setting up groups and supporting existing groups

Extension workers need to understand that it is easier in groups for men and women to discuss their situations of vulnerability, expectations and what actions they can take to reduce their vulnerability to food and livelihood insecurity. It is important that everyone understands the benefits of participating in the group and the importance of giving time for group activities. Groups need to be flexible too in terms of changing meeting times etc. Communities dealing with AIDS have a lot of urgent things to do in their homes and participating in a group may not be a high priority. Groups need to be attractive enough in terms of the activities they have agreed to work on together and flexible enough to meet the real needs of the particular group members of women and men involved.

3. How the group works

Good leadership, members contributions, forming a constitution and record keeping are important elements of a successful group. Extension workers might like to look for help from other service providers to train the groups in relevant group leadership and management skills. The group should be encouraged to take turns in leadership positions. This will allow opportunity for each member to learn new skills and in the event of death of a member, the group should still be in a position to continue working.

It is important for the extension worker not to push too hard at the beginning to form the leadership, groups have to be given enough time to get to know each other and to understand and decide if they want to be a member of the group or not. If they are pushed into a formal setting before time, the group may not survive, or the 'wrong' people may be the leaders.

4. Self-reliance, sustainability and links to external services

Once the group has been established and has been working for a while, the role of the extension worker changes from the person who started the activity and being an active participant, to providing support in terms of guidance and advice.

Groups do not work in isolation from the rest of the community and so their activities and attitudes can be influenced by local social, political and economic changes. To help groups develop, extension workers should encourage them to be self reliant, to take their own initiatives and to actively look for help and advice from other service providers. They should also be encouraged to contact each other in order to exchange ideas, solve problems and to organize help from outside agencies. There are many NGOs and private service providers that are willing to assist groups that formally request their services. The extension worker can guide groups to identify profiles of both formal and informal service providers by the use of participatory approaches, for example, institutional analysis and community mapping (these tools are described in detail in the **SEAGA Field Level Handbook**).

³For further details on the identification of vulnerable groups please refer to the vulnerability assessment checklist in chapter 3.



The role of farmers' groups in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS on rural farming communities

Farmers' groups for men and women can contribute significantly to the prevention of HIV/AIDS and in reducing its impact on agriculture by the following means:

- Groups provide acceptance, guidance and support to those living with HIV and their households.
- Groups can also be informal sources of information to extension workers on how HIV/AIDS is affecting individual households in terms of changes in numbers of widows, orphans, etc.
- Groups provide peer to peer counseling and share information with fellow group members and their families about HIV/AIDS prevention, care for the sick, and the impact of the epidemic on rural livelihoods.
- Groups provide the means to encourage those infected to open up and live positively. Such individuals can become role models for change in the community.
- Groups encourage those worried and sick to look for early treatment of HIV/AIDS symptoms. They are able to provide information about existing AIDS care and support services⁴.
- Once groups feel that they have a contribution to make, they might also try and establish by-laws and advocacy that work towards promoting healthy and responsible life styles. For example, regulating drinking hours, ensuring that young children continue attending school, safe guarding widow-inheritance and discouraging early marriages.
- Primary health care educative programmes may be undertaken within in the groups to improve the general health status of female and male farmers in the community.
- Groups can act as role models to the general community and as such influence desirable behaviour. For example, adopting labour saving technologies.
- Groups can start welfare assistance, based on the principles of "a friend in need" used to support those in AIDS related crises like sickness, deaths, orphans, etc.
- Groups can assist in passing on good traditional values and encourage positive behaviours which can help to stop the further spread of HIV/AIDS.

Questions extension workers may want to ask men and women in the community:

1. **What community groups already exist in your community?**
2. **What do these groups do to improve agricultural practices for households?**
3. **Do these groups include men and women from vulnerable households?**
4. **How can vulnerable households (including those affected by HIV/AIDS) be included as members of these existing groups?**
5. **How can you work to strengthen and or promote group formation among vulnerable households?**

⁴There are problems in this approach too as people often resist sharing information on prevention because if you are seen to be interested in discussing condoms and safe sex this is seen already as a sign of infection.

Figure 5: Providing extension services to a farmers' group



Questions that you, the extension worker, can ask yourself:

1. How can I make sure that I do not create further stigma at the community level when trying to encourage self-help groups?
2. Do the vulnerable households feel that they can take the risk of belonging to such groups (in terms of time available, making themselves visible in the community etc.)?
3. What existing services are being offered to HIV/AIDS vulnerable households and how can we work together with organizations involved with them to ensure we are not duplicating or going against what they are already doing?
4. How much time and energy can I realistically devote in each village to forming groups and mobilizing people? Who else can assist?

Labour saving technologies



We have already seen that one of the biggest impacts of HIV/AIDS at the household level has been the loss of labour for agricultural production. A possible answer to this problem might be found in promoting labour saving technologies. It makes great sense to work together because this can mean that those who are sharing work save time and labour that gives them more time to look after the sick, less anxiety about loss of time in the fields and perhaps a better chance of getting food for their household. In some communities there is a long tradition of labour sharing groups already, especially during peak labour times, such as planting, weeding and harvesting.

There are also examples of AIDS- affected women's groups who share farming and domestic tasks, such as childcare. This section focuses on the importance of promoting labour saving technologies as way of making sure that households can continue to produce crops and keep livestock both for home consumption and sale. Labour and time saving technologies that are suggested could be used by households facing labour problems due to unavailability of men and women to carry out farm activities. The section also discusses factors that could limit use of the suggested technologies and also explains approaches the extension worker can use to share appropriate labour saving technologies and practices that address the particular production needs of the vulnerable groups.

Up to now there has been no comprehensive research that provides specific labour saving technologies recommended for households affected by HIV/AIDS, instead the suggested technologies have been borrowed from existing innovations that have been designed to meet less energy effort requirements, time saving, increasing the speed and amount of processing, reduction of wastage and giving increasing value to the final products that result.

It is important to note that most of the available technologies require high financial investment and skill, which households affected by HIV/AIDS may not afford. So, extension workers are faced with the challenge of assessing and analysing technologies, including farm practices that require less energy levels, less skills, less time and that take into consideration gender concerns of women, men, the elderly and older children. The extension worker should also be prepared

for the fact that many people might not accept investing in a future that they feel has no place for them. It is important when working with vulnerable groups not to forget the emotional impact of the disease on individuals and not to only focus on how much female and male farmers can produce.

Specific labour saving technologies being promoted should be adaptable to the local agro-ecological environment, livelihood and cultural settings of the people. The following are some agricultural practices that could be of benefit to households that have already lost their labour or are in danger of doing so (when working with vulnerable households we do not have to wait until labour is lost to react).

Conservation agriculture

Conservation agriculture means there is no ploughing of the fields. Conservation agriculture tries to encourage minimum soil disturbance, permanent soil cover with the utilization of cover crops, adequate crop rotations and minimizes farm activities. Soil cover helps to keep weeds down, and checks pests and diseases through crop rotation. It improves the soils and fertility, as well as keeping the soils humid and cool meaning it allows crop production throughout the year. It reduces labour requirements especially in peak seasons for land preparation and weeding and overall reduces farm operational costs.

On the other hand conservation agriculture has some limitations because of the following factors:

- Conservation agriculture can be expensive because at the beginning money has to be invested in spraying the fields. However, using traditional methods of weed control can reduce the costs.
- Conservation agriculture also takes a lot of time and energy initially to prepare manure and apply it. However, this can be offset through encouraging labour pooling where through group effort manure is formed and applied.
- The crop yields are low for the first two years but progressively improve
- Research must be carried out to make sure that conservation agriculture works well with traditional farming practices in the area.

Farm tools

Tools and ploughs that are to be used by men, women and children in HIV/AIDS vulnerable households should be lightweight and strong. For example, such households should use small bladed hoes with long handles for digging. Animal drawn cultivators, where available and acceptable, can be encouraged to supplement the hand hoe. Animal drawn carts can also be constructed to save time in collecting water, firewood and to transport produce from the field to the home, mill or market. However, some rural communities are unaware of the potential for animal traction for ridging, planting, transport and other farm operations or its use is not tradition in the area. It is also important to note that HIV/AIDS affected households are often forced to sell all their assets and in most cases do not have money to buy more.

Introduction of new crop varieties

New crop varieties with higher yields and of better pest and drought resistance are needed, drawing also upon local varieties of indigenous crops. In Uganda there are improved crop varieties of maize, beans, sorghum, groundnuts, Soya beans, finger millet and upland rice.



More information about such crop varieties that could be adaptable to the local settings can be obtained from the nearest Agriculture Research Centers or district branches of Uganda Seeds Limited. The extension worker could also link farmers to private retailers dealing in agro-products.

Fish smoking

The Chorkor smoker is an improved piece of fish-smoking equipment that has been adopted in many parts of Africa. The Chorker smoker allows about ten trays of fish to be smoked at a time instead of one, making for fuel efficiency, significant improvement in the quality of smoking fish, and reduction in smoking time, and reduced labour input.

Fuel energy saving technology

Fuel-efficient stoves help to reduce fuel requirements; examples of these include clay liners, insulated baskets. (See illustration at the end of this section)

Interventions that could contribute to mitigation of HIV/AIDS impact among agro-pastoral communities

- Intensify agro-based technologies by introducing high yielding crop varieties of maize and sweet potatoes.
- Encourage conservation of pasture by making silage/hay.
- Encourage rainwater harvesting through construction of ground valley water tanks. Long-term interventions could include constructing valley dams for agro-pastoral communities.
- Intensify vector control measures to reduce the incidence of malaria and its consequences among communities. Agro-pastoral communities tend to lack health facilities and access to existing health facilities is difficult due to the long distances involved in reaching them from remote villages.
- Encourage tree planting, as a strategy to improve and sustain the local ecology. Encourage growing caliandra trees that are fodder for the animals but also conserve soils and water.

Ways of promoting labour saving technologies among vulnerable households

- Increase farmers' exposure to new ideas and access to information.
- Develop appropriate skills and attitudes for the sustained use of labour saving technologies and practices.

All of this can be realised by facilitating the formation of groups among vulnerable households and building partnerships with existing CBOs/NGOs as already suggested in the section on Group formation above.

Factors responsible for poor adoption of labour saving technologies and practices among households affected by HIV/AIDS.

There are certain factors that the extension worker needs to be aware of that could be responsible for the poor adoption of labour saving technologies among households affected by HIV/AIDS.

1. Not enough time available

Households affected by HIV/AIDS spend considerable time caring for sick family members, mourning when the family member dies. Most cultures prohibit digging during the mourning period, probably until after the last funeral rites. Elderly grandparents are finding themselves spending more and more time caring for young orphans, which leaves them little time and energy for learning new techniques. Though older children may have the time and energy available, they may not want to go into farming, a common enough thing for youths!

2. Limited cash

Households affected by HIV/AIDS spend the little income they have on medical care, funeral expenses and in meeting basic requirements for orphaned children. So they have no money to invest in buying agricultural inputs. In addition, most households affected by HIV/AIDS are forced to sell off or mortgage their assets during periods of sickness.

3. Limited awareness and skills

One of the things that people often have to say about households affected by HIV/AIDS, is they have limited awareness of new agricultural practices or technologies, but often men and women from such households have less time and energy to attend meetings where they would be given information on new skills. Very often their ability to attend extension activities is determined by the gender division of labour. Their access to and control over resources also has a role to play in how they can deal with new ideas. This should be taken into consideration when planning meetings and/or events for groups, as mentioned before. Remember to be flexible when working with HIV/AIDS vulnerable groups.

4. Culture

Cultural traditions often put forward the idea that the strength, productive capacity and status of women, are determined by the amount of land they (women) can cultivate and by the number of hours spent in the garden. Using labour and time saving farming practices may provide a wrong signal to the community, and community members may start to look at such a household as being lazy and unproductive.

Conclusion

Promoting labour saving technology remains one of the only hopes for rural households affected by HIV/AIDS that have lost their main source of labour. If the sustainability of farm households and their food security are to be guaranteed, especially that of HIV/AIDS affected households', then we must ensure that they have access to appropriate labour saving technologies through agriculture extension. Consideration must also be given to reviewing existing land rights, both civil and customary, so that widows and children can have the opportunity to posses and control their late husbands/fathers land. Agriculture extension must recognise the value of collaborating with progressive farmers, NGOs and the private sector in reaching vulnerable households with appropriate labour saving technologies.



Questions that you, the extension worker, can ask yourself:

1. What are the special labour requirements that households affected by HIV/AIDS might have?
2. How have households affected by HIV/AIDS responded to their labour shortage?
3. What action needs to be taken to reduce the problem of labour shortage among HIV/AIDS affected households?
4. Are there demonstration sites, including progressive farmers in the sub-county where labour saving technologies are being demonstrated?
5. How can I obtain the required technology to disseminate to vulnerable households? What strategies can I use to ensure that every vulnerable household has chance to receive and apply the required technology?
6. What strategies am I going to use to try and encourage the use of labour saving technologies among vulnerable households?
7. What opportunities already exist in the community for me to promote labour saving technologies? Through community groups, NGOs, etc

Figure 6: Fuel energy saving stoves

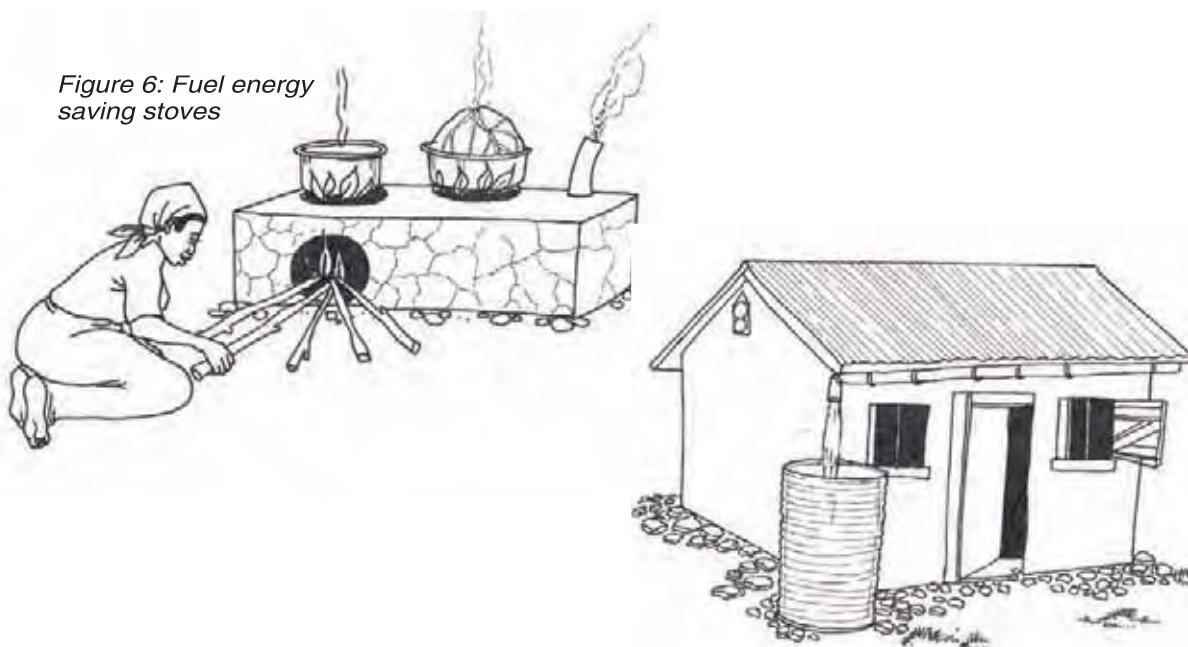


Figure 7: Domestic roof water harvesting that frees up labour and time for other economic activities