

Rural livelihoods diversification



Among rural households affected by HIV/AIDS ownership, control and management of some of their most important resources and assets like land, livestock, fishing equipment are often lost. Because their productive assets are reducing, vulnerable women, men and children are finding it hard to survive. The extension worker should therefore be able to support such vulnerable households in trying to find ways of improving their livelihoods, which may mean that they may have to change some of their livelihoods activities or change the way they have been managing their traditional livelihoods so far.

Why should vulnerable households improve their livelihoods?

- To improve their food security and meet their nutritional requirements (especially for those living with HIV infection)
- To get more income and be able to meet other household demands like medical expenses
- To improve their general standards of living
- To gain social status in the community
- To improve their health

Sometimes the effort to improve livelihoods of households affected by HIV/AIDS may mean that these men and women have to work off-farm. Doing more than one productive or income generating activity means that risks are spread, money is produced that can be invested in other activities, this increases peoples access to resources and should promote self sufficiency.

What men and women farmers can do to improve their livelihoods?

Some communities cannot change their agricultural activities because of their environment and traditional farming practices, so they need to look at ways of building on and improving their way of farming. This can involve the following:

- Specializing in one or two crops, for both subsistence and market purposes

- Improving performance in existing activities, for instance adopting better farming practices in order to get better yields
- Acquiring additional artisan skills, like for business enterprises
- Trying to improve the effectiveness and returns from available labour
- Reducing losses by improved processing and storage of the produce.

Issues to consider when improving livelihoods

When supporting vulnerable households in trying to improve their livelihoods, it is important for the extension worker to understand that:

- People usually know what they want but probably lack skills and resources.
- Time is needed to learn new approaches
- Money is needed to invest in certain farming activities
- Diversifying does not reduce the normal risks associated with any business or agricultural activity
- Diversification could spread household labour too thinly

Case study: Improving the value of Mukene fish

NARO has recently started supporting some selected fishing communities in Masaka district to improve processing of Mukene fish, using community participation to increase its market value. NARO will work with local groups to develop technologies that are low in cost and efficient and will train the community groups in skills to apply the technology of fish processing. Some of the technologies being considered in processing Mukene fish include:

- *Drying the fish on various surfaces, such as on old fishing nets and wire mesh so as to reduce mixing sand in with the fish*
- *Salting*
- *Fermentation. This will produce a food product that people can consume directly*
- *Deep-frying Mukene fish, to provide a snack that people can eat as a bite*
- *Smoking*
- *Milling, as an additional nutrient to weaning foods*
- *Icing – selling Mukene fish fresh at the market*

Pig rearing can be encouraged as a livelihood diversification option among fisheries communities. Resources that could support such a project include land, bi-products of fish to feed the pigs, waterweeds to also feed the pigs and availability of water.

Other ways of improving livelihoods

Some households affected by HIV/AIDS in crop farming communities have turned to livestock production as an alternative because crop management practices tend to be too demanding for the available labour. Such households could be encouraged to start keeping livestock that require minimal labour but also offer market opportunities over a shorter life span, for instance local poultry, goats, pigs, rabbits and bee-keeping. The extension worker should encourage and

ensure that vulnerable households participate actively in the design of such projects and should decide whether they prefer communal or backyard projects.

Encouraging diversification of livelihoods

Twekembe women's group, located in Masaka district and founded on a self-help basis currently has 30 members. Its aim is to improve food security and the incomes of women in the community.

The women (both married and widowed) practice labour pooling as a strategy to meet the labour force requirements during particular farming activities, especially among widow headed households. They collectively work on each other's farms in turn on an agreed activity, for instance ploughing, planting or weeding.

The women have also organised regular agriculture education programmes, where they acquire skills and techniques in conserving water and soils and the management of crops and animals. Each member of the group is encouraged to grow a vegetable garden in the backyard and keep livestock like local chicken, goats and pigs, which they acquire on a revolving basis. The group collectively seeks services of agriculture extension workers in the form of advice and veterinary care for their livestock. In an effort to generate income, women have also started growing vanilla. Members of the group now boast of having sufficient food in their homes.

Example: TWEKEMBE women's self-help group

Farm households can also improve their income by engaging in non-farm activities and people are becoming more and more involved in this type of activity. Female-headed households in particular appear to like small-scale income generating activities as a direct response to the impact of HIV/AIDS on their households. Households that are involved in a number of income generating activities, besides farming, are able to protect themselves against the impact of HIV/AIDS. This shows that livelihood diversification can make a big contribution to reducing problems associated with HIV/AIDS.

The role of extension workers in improving rural livelihoods opportunities

The extension worker needs to work with men and women in households in their communities to understand what resources and opportunities they already have that may help improve their livelihoods. The extension worker should also be able to provide some information on the cost and benefits involved so that people can make an informed choice on what they want to do.

Boys and girls are also very vulnerable to the impacts of HIV/AIDS and so need to be offered livelihood opportunities that meet their immediate needs. Maybe extension services can develop a formally structured programme designed to reach rural youth; such a programme should make sure it links the transfer of knowledge between older members of the community and their young counterparts. It is also necessary to provide groups of boys and girls with practical skills that will allow them to make choices for their future that may not necessarily include agricultural activities.

The issue of property and inheritance rights

In many vulnerable households the first issue that needs to be tackled is the issue of property or inheritance rights. Before we can start to discuss issues of actions to be taken to improve food

security, we might have to look into raising awareness and understanding of issues to do with who owns the land and who has the right to inherit property and land once the male head of the household dies.

- What is the legal position at the national level concerning land rights?
- What is the customary approach to the above (this will of course vary from tribe to tribe)
- What is the legal position at the national level concerning property inheritance?
- Does customary law make provisions for giving the widow continued access to and management of the family property?

In order to provide support and legal information to HIV/AIDS affected households, the extension worker should liaise with legal aid organizations and the Local Councils to help raise awareness of people's legal rights concerning property inheritance and to resolve land and property related disputes.

Guiding questions for the extension worker to address with men and women in the community:

1. What activities do people in your community do to earn a living?
2. What activities do vulnerable groups in the community do to earn a living?
3. What are some of the problems associated with depending too much on one particular activity to earn a living, especially among vulnerable households?
4. What are vulnerable households trying to do to improve and/or change their ways of earning their living in agriculture or off farm?
5. What else is there (resources) in your community for the vulnerable groups to improve and/or change their way of earning a living?
6. What knowledge, information, skills or practical support do vulnerable groups need to improve their ways of earning a living?
7. Where do you need to go or whom do you need to contact to get the knowledge, information, skills and practical support that vulnerable groups need?

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

1. Who should I network with to encourage vulnerable households to improve their livelihoods?
2. Are there livelihoods improvement programmes in the community that are working? Are they targeting vulnerable households? If not why not and how can I persuade such programmes to support vulnerable households?
3. How will I be able to measure positive changes in livelihoods among vulnerable households?

HIV/AIDS, nutrition and food security

This section outlines important issues on HIV/AIDS and its relationship with nutrition and food security that extension workers should be aware of in order to provide the right information and support to improve nutrition and food security among households affected by HIV/AIDS. This type of support should focus on increasing



food productivity, understanding its availability and distribution in desirable food values, among rural households and particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS.

People infected with HIV have an increased risk of malnutrition because they suffer from loss of appetite. On the other hand, malnutrition increases the effect of HIV on the human body that leads to further weakness, loss of body mass and energy. This kind of condition becomes very severe for vulnerable households, who are more likely to have already suffered from food insecurity and malnourishment before getting the disease.

HIV- positive people improve their general health status by improving their diets, exercising, abstaining from or having protected sex, eliminating cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption. Proper nutrition leads to a healthier body. Good nutrition maintains body weight, strengthens immunity and resistance to diseases, slows the progression of HIV/AIDS and improves the appetite. Improved nutrition allows HIV-positive people to continue leading a more productive life and reduces the burden of care giving for other members of the household.

The importance of proper nutrition to people with HIV/AIDS

When a person with HIV infection progresses to the AIDS stage, he/she loses weight, and suffers from frequent attacks of illnesses known as opportunistic infections.

Proper guidance and education on nutrition is very vital as the individual progresses with HIV infection and it is important also for the affected family members because of the following:

- It helps HIV infected people to build up healthy eating habits
- It helps to improve the effect of medicine and therefore promotes quicker recovery from illness.
- It sustains the health and well being of the person with HIV infection or disease so he/she can lead a more productive and healthier life.
- It helps households to understand the need to take action to improve food security, for instance through using labour-saving technologies, growing fast maturing and high value food crops, improving post harvesting processes.
- It guides households on more effective ways of preparing and distributing food.

What vulnerable households do in situations of food scarcity

Households affected by HIV/AIDS usually use a number of ways to meet food shortages and nutritional requirements. These provide short-term relief but have long-term effects on the nutritional status of families. Some of the ways in which such households manage food shortages include:

- Reducing the number of meals eaten every day and this greatly depends on seasonal variations
- Consuming cheaper food with lower food value, like cassava flour
- Borrowing against future harvests
- Borrowing livestock to have access to milk
- Increasing the sale of household assets
- Hiring labour to increase the amount of land being cultivated
- Sending off children (especially those who have lost their mother) to live with relatives somewhere else
- Relying on children to meet farm labour requirement
- Forcing children to leave school to engage in casual labour activities, as a source of earning income
- In extreme cases begging for food.

HIV/AIDS causes and increases people's exposure to food insecurity and HIV/AIDS because of the following situations:

The following paragraphs take a closer look at specific cases of nutrition issues among mixed agriculture, pastoral and fishing communities.*

Mixed agricultural communities:

- Households that are already food insecure are often forced to take action to supplement their livelihoods in different ways during times of stress, for example during periods of drought, men tend to migrate to towns in search of waged labour. The long period away from their wives often means they get involved in extra-marital sexual relationships, and so increase their risk of getting HIV/AIDS. On the other hand their wives might be forced to offer sexual favours to other men in exchange of cash and food, which too increases their risk of HIV/AIDS infection.
- Once households are affected by HIV/AIDS they lose their labour force because of the illness so the amount of land that is being cultivated for crop production is less, as labour for ploughing, weeding and harvesting is not available. This in turn increases the risk of food insecurity.

- Cash crop production reduces while food crops increase among widow headed households, and the other way round for widower headed households. A big amount of the food produced is eventually sold to get cash to cover medical care costs for the person who is sick.
- Farming practices of households often change from high labour-intensive to low labour-intensive and HIV/AIDS affected households often have poor adoption of modern farming practices, leading to poor agricultural yields.
- The death of male family members often affects post-harvest storage because it is usually the men who are responsible for building food granaries.

Fishing communities

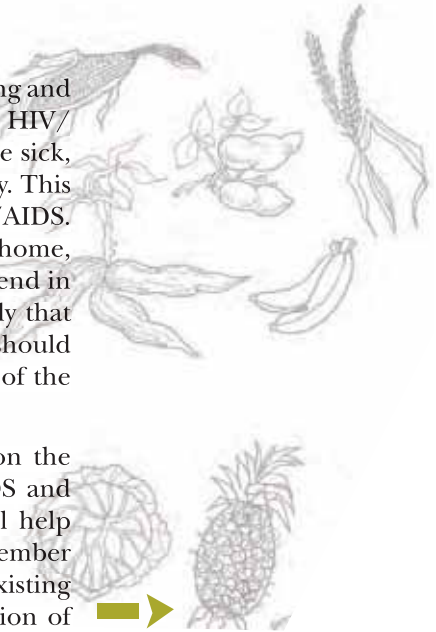
- When a fisherman who is the head of a household dies, his widow cannot go fishing, because in most fishing communities people believe that women should not catch fish.
- The size of catch reduces because men can no longer do the same amount of work due to their illness and this means lower incomes that reduce access to food among HIV/AIDS affected households.

* Adapted from Piwoz and Prebel, 2000.

Improving food security and nutrition among households affected by HIV/AIDS.

A recent FAO/NAADS study shows that households in mixed farming and fishing communities had high awareness of the linkages between HIV/AIDS and nutrition but are unable to prepare special meals for the sick, because they have a lot of other demands on their time and money. This is a reality for many of the households who are dealing with HIV/AIDS. Many were already food insecure before the disease entered their home, so extension workers have to be realistic in what they can recommend in terms of improving nutrition. There is no use in saying to a family that is barely having one meal a day of potatoes or cassava that they should cook chicken, fish and green leafy vegetable for the sick member of the household!

1. Community extension workers should provide information on the importance of nutrition for people suffering from HIV/AIDS and try to help affected households come up with ideas that will help them get access to better nutrition not just for the sick member of the household but for all. Extension workers can use existing guidelines on nutrition to inform caregivers on the preparation of



- In low fishing seasons, fishermen tend to migrate to other lake areas in search of better catches. This means that fishermen have to live away from their families for several months at a time, their cash earnings and leisure time often leads them to engage in risky sexual relations. Their wives too may be forced to engage in other sexual relationships in return for food and income.
- Fisher folk greatly depend on fishing and fish processing for their livelihood. Any slight reduction in the catch will of course immediately affect their incomes and food supply.
- Fishing communities on the lakes depend on the purchase of other food from mainland agricultural communities. If there is food shortage due to poor harvests, then the feeding patterns and nutritional status of fisher folk is affected.
- Pastoral communities are usually located in remote areas and this means they have less access to extension and other services. So pastoral communities have less chance of learning modern farming technologies and the possibility of learning about livelihood diversification, this is even truer for HIV/AIDS affected households.
- Keeping livestock, especially cattle is very labour intensive. Frail widows (who are also in most cases suffering from HIV/AIDS illnesses) and orphans can hardly meet the required labour input. This leads to lower yields in produce that in turn affects consumption and sales.
- Traditional support systems that previously provided assistance to widows and orphans have collapsed because they cannot meet the needs of the ever-increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS affected households in the community.

Pastoral communities

- In pastoral communities, numbers of heads of cattle tend to reduce among households affected by HIV/AIDS due to distress sales, to meet medical bills and other care related expenses. This reduces income and the consumption of milk at the household level.
- The quality of livestock usually reduces when

locally available foods (in season) that are home grown (or wild) and/or affordable from the market; ensuring foods of all desirable nutrients are given; proteins carbohydrates/fats, vitamins and minerals plus clean drinking water.

2. Extension workers when possible should promote low-input/high-output farming enterprises, for example backyard farming that can be handled by people living with HIV/AIDS, older children, the elderly and other caregivers, because of their problems with labour and time. Households in the community should be encouraged to grow crop varieties that provide all food nutrients for example green vegetables, fruits, cereals and tubers; plus keep poultry, and other animals for animal protein sources (again here we need to be practical and understand what is realistic for the households we are working with). The crop varieties planted should take short maturing periods to yield, require less capital, should not be labour intensive and should be intended to improve nutrition and sales of any surplus.
3. Extension workers also need to support communities in strengthening food safety nets, through improved methods of food processing for example reducing moisture by drying, and storage. This should help households stretch food supplies from one harvest to another and ensure food availability in-between harvests.
4. Extension workers should mobilize and organize, especially vulnerable community groups (women, youths and households affected by HIV/AIDS) for self-help initiatives as a way of linking them to poverty alleviation projects.

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

1. How can I assess what makes people in a community food insecure and gives them poor nutrition, especially in households affected by HIV/AIDS?
2. How do people store food locally?
3. What action (traditional and modern) can be taken to try and promote food security and nutrition among vulnerable households?
4. What institutions do I need to work with in order to promote these actions?

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Resources on the web

- FAO's HIV/AIDS and Food Security Website:** <http://www.fao.org/hiv aids>
- FAO's Participatory Website:** <http://www.fao.org/participation/>
- International AIDS alliance:** <http://www.aidsalliance.org/>
- SEAGA Socioeconomic and Gender Analysis Programme, FAO:** <http://www.fao.org/sd/seaga/>
- UNAIDS – Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS:** <http://www.unaids.org/>
- UNIFEM Webportal on Gender and AIDS,** <http://www.genderandaids.org/>