

# **The evolving contexts of AIDS and the challenges for food security and rural livelihoods**

by **B. Rau, G. Rugalema, K. Mathieson and L. Stloukal**

**AIDS**  
**challenges**

September 2008



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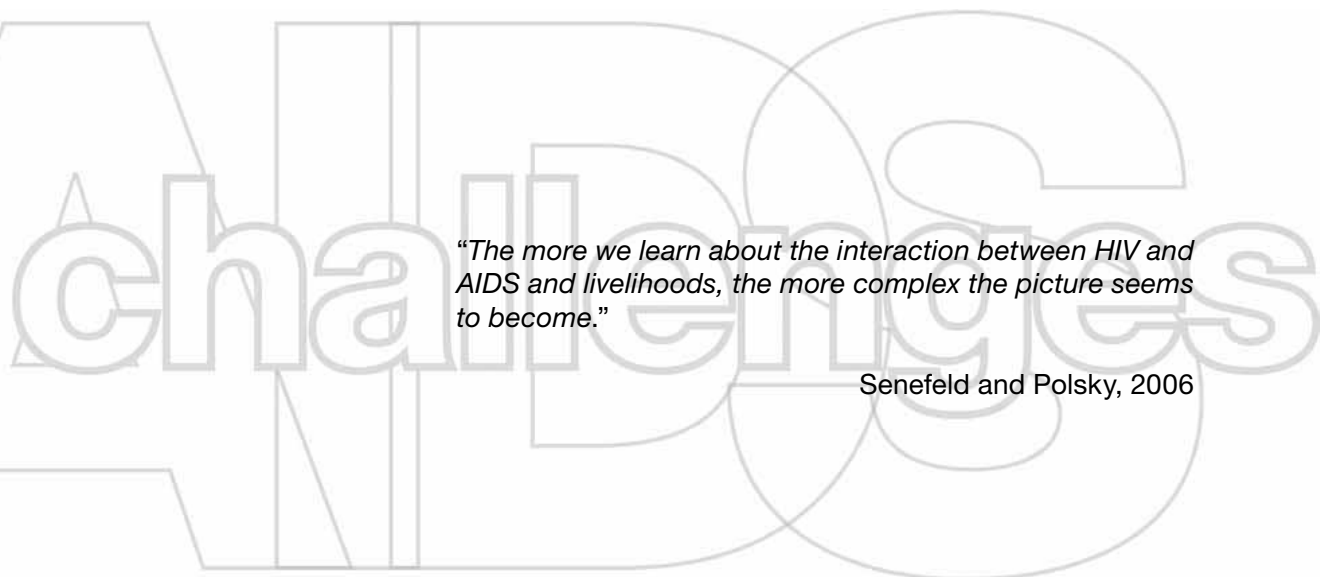
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*"The more we learn about the interaction between HIV and AIDS and livelihoods, the more complex the picture seems to become."*

Senefeld and Polsky, 2006

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## Acronyms

<b>AIDS</b>	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
<b>ART</b>	antiretroviral therapy
<b>ARV</b>	antiretroviral
<b>CBO</b>	community-based organization
<b>ESW</b>	Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (FAO)
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>HIV</b>	human immunodeficiency virus
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>TB</b>	tuberculosis
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>VCT</b>	voluntary counselling and testing
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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## Foreword

Over the past 30 years, the HIV virus has spread unevenly around the world, causing very large epidemics in parts of East and Southern Africa, and relatively small epidemics outside Africa. By the 1990s, it had become clear that the HIV epidemic was undoing years of slowly earned progress in rural development by triggering significant increases in rural poverty and producing widespread destitution in the most affected countries. In response to this unprecedented threat, FAO has been mandated by its main governing bodies to monitor the impact of the disease on food security and rural livelihoods, as well as to support member countries in their efforts to prevent increases in HIV incidence in rural settings and to mitigate the negative effects of the epidemic on agriculture and rural development.

Recent evidence about the dynamics of HIV and AIDS indicates that over the last decade the percentage of the population infected with HIV has stabilized everywhere except Eastern Europe. Worldwide, approximately 0.8 percent of adults aged 15 to 49 years are infected with HIV. HIV prevalence is 1 percent or lower in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa, where it is 5 percent overall, ranging from less than 1 percent in several West African countries, to more than 15 percent in some East and Southern African countries. Although the rate of new infections has probably peaked in all world regions, the absolute number of HIV-positive individuals is expected to continue to grow in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of continued high population growth rates and the only moderate success of prevention programmes in reducing HIV incidence, a large number of adolescents and adults in sub-Saharan Africa are still likely to become infected. This situation poses a challenge to policies and programmes aimed at preventing further spread of HIV and mitigating its effects on people's lives and livelihoods.

This paper focuses on the changing context of the HIV epidemic, with the aim of generating new insights into what it means for rural societies. The paper argues that although there are signs that the epidemic is stabilizing or even declining in some highly affected countries, the socio-economic effects associated with HIV and AIDS will continue to be considerable for many years to come – and as such they require innovative, well coordinated and appropriately planned responses from the agriculture sector. The authors trust that readers will find the paper informative and stimulating.

**Marcela Villarreal**

Director

Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW)