



# Averting 'New Variant Famine'

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## AIDS-affected young people's livelihood strategies and long-term vulnerability

*In this briefing we consider the potential of the various livelihood strategies AIDS-affected young people adopt to reduce their long-term vulnerability.*

Young people attribute experience of hunger and poverty to employment loss in their households, marriage (particularly young women in Ha Rantelali), poor harvests or sickness or death of family members. Sources of potential security include income from employment (especially in households with several migrant workers); pensions; live-stock (particularly in Ha Rantelali, but also used for saving by some in Nihelo); and good social networks offering food or casual employment in times of need. To reduce vulnerability, livelihood strategies need to help young people avoid challenging circumstances and develop sources of security.

### Staying in school

It is far from clear that continuing in education improves rural young people's livelihood prospects. With a few exceptions (the teacher in Ha Rantelali and three builders in Nihelo), those who attended secondary educa-

tion, whether resident in the village or elsewhere, were not engaged in more secure livelihood ventures.

### Herding

Many Basotho boys chose herding over education. Herdboys are usually paid one cow a year and, as the cattle breed, the herd should increase. However, cattle are vulnerable to drought (a quarter of Ha Rantelali's cattle died in 2007), disease and armed cattle theft. Herdboys are also vulnerable to maltreatment by employers, who commonly provide poor conditions, impose penalties for loss or injuries to animals or fail to pay at the end of a year. Nonetheless, herding does allow some boys to accumulate valuable assets.

### Casual work

Casual work is often understood as a livelihood strategy for people in desperate situations, which increases long-term vulnerability by eroding human, natural, physical, financial or social capital. However, some young people with no dependants and reliant on parents or guardians for food and shelter can, in the

short-term, invest their earnings for a small business such as tomato growing.

### Business

Many young people in Malawi and some in Lesotho had engaged in business of various forms, but most had ultimately failed, for myriad often unpredictable reasons. Some businesses are much more lucrative than others: in general these have higher start up costs and



Trading chickens between Nihelo and the market

thus greater risk associated with failure. However, failure need not imply livelihood vulnerability unless money has been borrowed: businesses generally generate an income for a time and can provide valuable experience and contacts. Nonetheless, having engaged in a relatively lucrative business did not appear to offer long-term security.

### Key Points:

- Staying in school seldom helps rural young people's livelihood prospects
- Herding can allow young men to preserve or accumulate valuable assets (for their families or themselves), but is far from secure
- Casual work may allow young people without dependents to accumulate very small amounts of capital for investment in business
- Businesses can generate income, but are difficult to sustain, can result in indebtedness and seldom offer long-term security
- Labour migration can make young people vulnerable, and does not usually provide the opportunities for saving that are envisaged
- The impacts of marriage on livelihoods differ between matrilineal and patrilineal societies and between men and women



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### Migrant work

Young people from both communities had engaged in migrant work, usually as urban domestic workers, but also on agricultural estates in Malawi and in garment factories in Lesotho. Experiences were mixed. Some had enjoyed domestic work and were paid well, although very



Maseru's garment factories

few had made any savings and several had experienced sexual abuse. Work on agricultural estates was seen as poorly paid (worse than *ganyu*),

physically grueling and a last resort in the short term to support subsistence. It also removes people from their fields at crucial times. Similarly, while Basotho girls envisaged investing factory wages in furthering their education, the paucity of wages and high cost of living around the factories seldom permitted money to be saved. Moreover, many factory workers are hired by the day and reportedly resort to sex work to supplement their income.

### Marriage

Marriage is highly significant in young people's livelihood trajectories. Young women generally become very dependent on husbands (and in-laws), while young men gain independence, but also new responsibilities. Young

wives in matrilocal Nihelo almost universally felt their lives had improved due to marriage, although some



One young women in Nihelo took a photograph of her husband who she was very proud of. He was making a good living as a builder

were abandoned by their husbands, leaving them vulnerable to poverty, especially if they had children. In patrilocat Ha Rantelali, by contrast, many young married women felt their lives had deteriorated, with husbands unable to find work and unwilling to allow their wives to seek employment elsewhere.

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**Project website:** [www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/sse/chg/projects/nvf](http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/sse/chg/projects/nvf)

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