



# Averting 'New Variant Famine'

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## Project Summary: Averting 'New Variant Famine' in Southern Africa: Building Food Secure Rural Livelihoods with AIDS-affected Young People

### Background

Southern Africa is experiencing the world's highest HIV prevalence rates alongside recurrent food crises. This has prompted scholars to hypothesise a 'New Variant Famine' in which inability to access food is driven by the effects of AIDS. In line with this, it has been suggested that the impacts of AIDS on young people today is likely to diminish their prospects of food security in adult life. In particular, children whose parents die of AIDS may fail to inherit land or other productive assets, and transmission of knowledge and skills between the generations may be disrupted, leaving young people ill-prepared to build food-secure livelihoods for

themselves. However, prior to this research, those propositions were largely untested.

The 'Averting New Variant Famine' research project was therefore undertaken to generate new, in-depth understanding of



Is land undercultivated because AIDS is robbing young people of necessary resources?

how AIDS, in interaction with other factors, is impacting on the livelihood activities, opportunities and choices of young people in rural southern Africa.

### Research Methods

Research was conducted in two villages in Malawi and Lesotho, two of the worst affected countries. The fieldwork comprised four elements: 1) community and household profiling to provide a contextual understanding of livelihood responses to sickness and death, and in particular how young people are incorporated in livelihood strategies; 2)

participatory research with more than thirty 10-24-year-olds in each community (around half of whom were affected by AIDS) to explore their aspirations, means of accessing livelihood opportunities, obstacles faced and decision-making processes; 3) semi-structured interviews with policy makers and other key informants to explore the linkages with macro-level policies and processes; 4)

### Research questions

1. In what ways are AIDS-affected/unaffected young people involved in livelihood activities?
2. What livelihood opportunities are available to AIDS-affected young people and what shapes access to these?
3. How do AIDS-affected young people make decisions about livelihood strategies in their transitions to adulthood?
4. Do the livelihood strategies adopted reduce or increase long-term vulnerability?
5. How might AIDS-affected young people's prospects of achieving sustainable rural livelihoods as adults be enhanced?

life history interviews with more than twenty 18-24 year olds in each village to explore the factors shaping their lifecourses and livelihoods.



Boys in Lesotho producing a poster about their livelihoods

### Key Points:

- Research was conducted to examine whether the impacts of AIDS on young people are likely to contribute to 'New Variant Famine' in southern Africa
- The research adopted a case study approach, based on two villages, one in Malawi and the other in Lesotho
- Data were collected through household and community profiling; participatory activities with young people; and interviews with key informants in the policy sphere, and with young people
- AIDS does not appear to have generalized impacts on young people's livelihoods
- Interesting findings relate to the role of marriage and of social networks
- Policy responses should focus on assisting young people to engage in business, securing livelihood assets for them and providing social protection



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### Research findings

The research indicates diverse ways in which AIDS impacts on the livelihoods and prospects of young people, but no systematic pattern. The only generalised distinction between AIDS-affected and unaffected youth in the two villages is that those directly affected generally remain in school longer. At the individual level, AIDS is one of many interacting factors affecting access to livelihoods and choice of livelihood strategies. It has many impacts, but these differ with individual circumstance, as well as be-

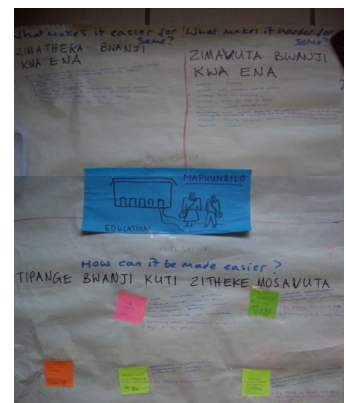


Nihelo children's analysis of the impacts on livelihoods when a parent is sick or dies

ing affected by processes operating locally, nationally and internationally. The livelihood strategies young people adopt offer differing levels of reward and long-term security. Key areas of interest that will be the focus of further analysis and academic publications include the roles of marriage and of social networks in influencing livelihood prospects. The research also contributes theoretically to studies of livelihood sustainability, particularly in relation to the significance of temporality (when AIDS strikes can have profound effects on young people whose lives are undergoing rapid change) and relationality (relationships with families and the production of new relationships through marriage play key roles in shaping livelihoods). Ultimately, the research suggests that AIDS is unlikely to have the sort of systematic impact on long-term food security that the new variant famine hypothesis envisages.

### Policy recommendations

Focusing on increasing school attendance is an inadequate response. Ru-



Poster outlining young people's recommendations for education policy and practice in Malawi

ral young people would benefit particularly from opportunities for vocational training and development of market opportunities; measures to improve access to productive assets such as land; and social protection measures that allow young people to devote their energies to accruing livelihood assets to depend on in the long term. However, targeting of AIDS-affected youth is not advocated.

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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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