

RES-167-25-0167 - Averting New Famine in Southern Africa: Building Food-Secure Livelihoods with Aids-Affected Young People

Southern Africa is the part of the world most affected by AIDS. It is also prone to recurrent food crises. Indeed, there is a hypothesis, known as New Variant Famine (NVF) that an inability to access food relates more to AIDS than to environmental conditions. Earlier reports suggested that AIDS might affect the ability of young people in the region to access food in the future. For example, family illness might make it harder for them to learn farming skills or mean they do not inherit family land. This new study from Brunel University considers these and other areas. It explores the impact that AIDS, in combination with other factors - such as the local economy and development policy - has on the ability of young people in the rural parts of Southern Africa to secure a livelihood. The study questions the NVF hypothesis and has important conclusions for policy.

Key Findings

- AIDS does impact the ability of young people in rural Southern Africa to secure their livelihood, but not in a systematic way. There was only one generalised distinction between youths who were affected by AIDS and those who were not: the former stayed in school longer.
- At an individual level, AIDS was just one of many interacting factors that influenced the ability of young people to secure a livelihood and the choices available to them. AIDS certainly had a big impact on the youths in the study, but these impacts were different for each individual. The impact of AIDS on these people was further influenced by local, national and international factors.
- One of the ways AIDS does affect food security is its impact on young people's decisions about when and whom to marry. AIDS also alters their social networks, which are important in providing opportunities to pursue livelihoods.
- These findings suggest that AIDS is unlikely to have the sort of systematic impact on long-term food security that the New Variant Famine hypothesis envisages.
- The study makes a series of policy recommendations. These include vocational training, removal of the costs associated with primary education, improving access to land, a minimum "safety net" of food security and cash transfer programmes.
- However, the study concludes that intervention should not be directly targeted at AIDS-affected young people. This is not because AIDS does not damage their prospects; rather it is because it does not predict vulnerability. In one of the areas in the study, for example, all of the young

people were vulnerable, not just those affected by AIDS.

About the Study

The study was led by Dr Nicola Ansell at the Centre for Human Geography, Brunel University. The research involved interviews and participatory sessions with 10-24-year-olds in two villages in Malawi and Lesotho and interviews with policymakers and practitioners.

Further Information

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Key Words

Food insecurity, AIDS, children, youth, Southern Africa, Malawi, Lesotho