



# Averting 'New Variant Famine'

Briefing Notes No 10

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## AIDS-affected young people's access to livelihood opportunities

The livelihood opportunities available to young people fall broadly into categories of subsistence agriculture; cash crop production; livestock rearing; business; local casual employment; and migrant work (including formal sector, agricultural estate and domestic work). Rewards (and levels of security) vary within and between categories.

### The assets required

Engagement in any livelihood requires access to

Incomes in Nihelo	
tea estate work	1 212 kwacha/12 days
ganyu	100 kwacha/day
selling scones	620 kwacha/month
radio repair	350 kwacha/day (but not every day)
bicycle repair	800 kwacha/day (but not every day)
school teaching	12,000 kwacha/month

livelihood assets. Knowledge of opportunities is vital, both broad possibili-

ties and specific job opportunities. Most livelihoods require skills, some at higher levels or less readily attained. Business and agriculture require capital for inputs and equipment. Different types of agriculture (such as *dimba* cultivation) require particular types of land. Some forms of (better paid) employment require educational qualifications, and access to urban employment requires a place to stay when seeking and undertaking work.

## Factors shaping access to livelihood assets

Shaping access to these prerequisites are factors operating at diverse scales.

**International and national level:** Employment possibilities, for instance, reflect international market conditions and trade agreements (which no longer favour Malawi's agricultural estates but have encouraged a burgeoning of garment factories in Lesotho). National policies including those on education, vocational training, business finance, social protection, and agriculture strongly affect access to secure livelihoods.

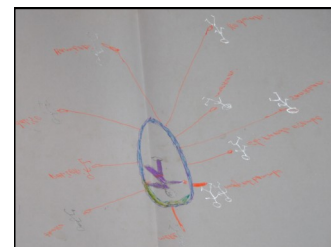
**Local conditions:** Differences between the communities are partly explainable by national level differences, but local conditions also play a role, shaping awareness of opportunities, the availability of markets and environmental conditions. Nihelo's plentiful (but impoverished) markets and limited agricultural land present very different prospects for business and agriculture than the remote harsh environment of Ha Rantelali. There are also significant cultural differences, including between patrilineal traditions in Lesotho and matrilineal in southern Malawi,

which affect how marriage impacts on young people's livelihoods.

**Individuals and their networks:** At a more individual level, access to opportunities reflects the availability of ideas, encouragement, and resources from among personal acquaintances, particularly committed adults. Many in Nihelo learned skills from their friends, but borrowed money from parents to start a business. Social networks are also important for learning about job opportunities, and providing accommodation near places of employment.

### Key Points:

- Rural livelihood strategies offer varying levels of reward and security
- Access to opportunities depends on a young person's assets, e.g. skills, capital, land, social networks
- Access to assets is shaped by factors operating at scales from the international and national to the local and individual
- AIDS impacts on individual circumstances, and in turn on access to assets and to livelihood opportunities, in diverse and rather unpredictable ways



Patric's social network map, identifying the friends from whom he learned to hunt, to irrigate tomatoes and to build, and those who have helped him find casual work and work in town. The distance between Patric and the friend indicates their relative importance in his life.



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### AIDS and the shaping of livelihood opportunities



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AIDS impacts on these individual circumstances and can diminish livelihood options and chances of success. AIDS can reduce the money available to invest. Conversely, young people whose parents die sometimes inherit land, livestock, equipment and even money that they can employ, provided these are not seized by others. AIDS in the household may also mean less attention and encouragement from adults. It can impact on social networks, which are of particular importance for those affected by AIDS. Some of the most successful young people in the study were orphans who had support and en-

couragement from adult relatives. Other AIDS-affected young people were vulnerable because of weak social networks, exacerbated by AIDS-related stigma and gossip. Significantly, marriage disrupts the social networks of men in Malawi and women in Lesotho, reducing some livelihood opportunities. The quality of social networks also reflects individual personality, with likeable young people gaining better opportunities.

Temporality is vitally important. Young people's lives change quickly and they have to take 'once-in-a-lifetime' decisions, such

as leaving school or getting married. This makes them especially vulnerable to AIDS-related disruptions, with potentially long-term effects on future livelihoods. Typically, after leaving school a young person has a window of opportunity before marriage gives them new responsibilities. During this period, they may experiment with different livelihood activities, provided they have access to financial capital and encouragement. Many secure financial support from parents at this time, but if their parents are sick or have died, their opportunities are reduced.



Victor and Blessings were fortunate to inherit this small fields when their parents died. They live with their grandmother and cultivate the field, which they will continue to benefit from, at least until they marry.

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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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