



Averting 'New Variant Famine'

Policy Briefing

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Building Food Secure Rural Livelihoods with AIDS-affected Young People

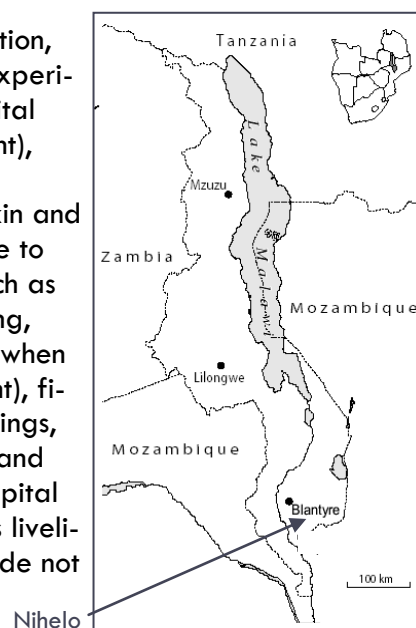
The research

Southern Africa is experiencing the world's highest HIV prevalence rates alongside recurrent food crises. It has been suggested that people's inability to access food is driven by the effects of AIDS (the 'New Variant Famine' hypothesis), and that the impacts of AIDS on young people today is likely to diminish their livelihood prospects in adult life, heightening food insecurity yet further. In particular, it is hypothesised that 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.

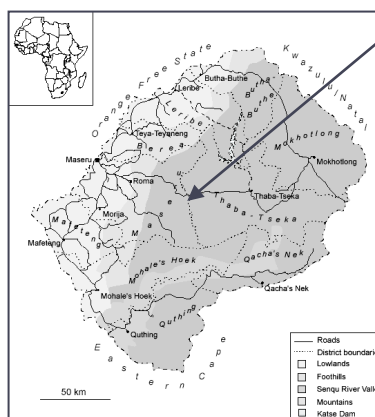
The 'Averting New Variant Famine' research project was therefore undertaken to generate evidence of how AIDS, in interaction with other factors, is impacting on the livelihood activities, opportunities and choices of young people in rural southern Africa. The research, based in two case study villages, Nihelo in Malawi and Ha Rantelali in Lesotho, employed a range of methods. These included participatory activities with about eighty 10-24-year-olds that sought to explore their perceptions of the impacts of adult sickness and death on young people's livelihoods, as well as individual life history interviews with more than forty 18-24-year-olds that charted influences on livelihoods. The policy recommendations presented here are also informed by information gathered through interviews with more than eighty policy makers and practitioners from government ministries, UN and donor agencies, parastatals and NGOs.

The research, set broadly within a sustainable livelihoods framework, recognised that young people's future food security prospects depend in part upon their being able to accumulate livelihood assets to use in the future. These assets include forms of hu-

man capital (education, training, relevant experience), physical capital (livestock, equipment), social capital (relationships with kin and others who are able to offer assistance, such as finance, skills training, somewhere to stay when seeking employment), financial capital (savings, inheritance, grants and loans) or natural capital (notably land). Thus livelihood activities include not



Nihelo



Ha Rantelali

only those focused on immediate needs, but also securing assets for future use.

While most livelihood activities undertaken by young people generate net welfare gain to the communities in which they live, the

extent of this net gain varies. Some activities principally entail a redistribution of community resources in favour of AIDS-affected young people (for instance baking scones or brewing beer for sale locally). Other activities generate food for consumption or resources that can be used to purchase food (for instance cultivating subsistence crops or producing goods or services for sale beyond the immediate community). Both are important, as they can enable vulnerable individuals and households to access food.

The research findings indicate diverse ways in which AIDS impacts on the livelihoods and prospects of young people, but no systematic pattern. 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 being affected by processes operating locally, nationally and internationally. The livelihood strategies young people adopt offer differing levels of reward and long-term security. There are a number of areas of policy that might better promote AIDS-affected young people's engagement in rewarding and relatively secure livelihoods.

Education policy

Access to education was the main concern of most young research participants. In both communities, orphaned children were more likely to be attending school than those whose parents were living, and AIDS-affected youth progressed further through school than those unaffected. Free primary education and bursaries for vulnerable children have clearly had some success. There remain some obstacles to attendance, particularly in Malawi. Here, many children dropped out early because their parents/guardians were unable or unwilling to pay 'development fees', or because they lacked suitable clothing or soap to wash their uniforms. Deterrents to attendance such as requirement for uniforms, and the expulsion of girls who become pregnant or marry, persist even where they are formally prohibited. School attendance alone, however, is inadequate to promote sustainable livelihoods; most young people reported their education had benefited them little in relation to livelihoods, even



Most boys in Ha Rantelali are anxious to remain in school

among the few who had progressed to secondary school. There was no apparent relationship between

school attendance and livelihood success. To assure future food security, therefore, measures focused on attendance are inadequate, and educational curricula need to be made more relevant to rural livelihoods. In pursuing the elusive goal of formal sector employment (heavily promoted by schools), schoolchildren forego other opportunities to accumulate resources that might be of greater benefit to them in the longer term.

Vocational training and support for income generation

In neither community can the available agricultural land adequately sustain the population. Other income sources are therefore needed. In the Malawi village most young people engage in varied income



Many young people in Nihelo learn livelihoods informally from friends and acquaintances

generating activities; in the Lesotho village the range of livelihood activities is much more limited. In both communities, young people and adults advocated greater availability of vocational training. Currently opportunities are restricted to very small numbers: only one young person in the study had received any formal training, and informal training was expensive for those without personal connections. Some NGOs have schemes whereby local artisans are paid to provide basic training: these might usefully be scaled up, although there is a need to make a diverse range of scales available in any community if local markets are not to become saturated. In Nihelo, although activities are very varied, most businesses fail, sometimes plunging young people into debt. Guidance is required on how to make businesses successful and self-sustaining as well as training in skills. In Ha Rantelali the challenge is to identify business opportunities in an environment where the local market is small and people are ac-

customed to purchasing competitively priced industrially produced goods imported from South Africa under the terms of the Southern African Customs Union. In both countries, the identification of opportunities and mechanisms for tapping non-local and international markets would benefit young people. Many youth have skills that they are unable to employ for lack of start-up capital. Loans are mistrusted in both communities, but start-up grants or other means of transferring cash to young people for potentially productive activities would be of benefit.

Cash transfers

Basic minimum levels of security are needed to enable young people to expend time, energy and money on anything beyond day-to-day subsistence activities. Various forms of social protection are being explored in both countries. Both Malawi and Lesotho have been introducing forms of targeted cash transfer over recent years. In Lesotho old age pensions were introduced in 2004. These have proven beneficial, including to AIDS-affected children, many of whom live with elderly relatives. Malawi has opted instead for cash transfers targeting ultra-poor, high-dependency-ratio households. This scheme is rolling out and has yet to reach Nihelo. Such measures offer security to those in benefiting households – allowing young people to remain in school, or to have access to resources to invest in business for example. The availability of greater resources in some households also provides other young people with more opportunities to undertake paid casual work and provides a better market for small businesses. (Young married women in Lesotho for instance, brew beer for sale on pension day.)

Agricultural subsidies

Malawi has been providing agricultural subsidies in various forms for some years. For young people in Nihelo, an efficiently delivered fertiliser subsidy is considered vital. This enables higher levels of production from the very limited land available, and frees the time that would otherwise need to be spent in casual labour to pay for food or fertiliser. It does, however, encourage continued cultivation of maize in a way that is dependent on imported fertiliser, and perhaps inhibits innovation and forms of livelihood that are more sustainable environmentally. There would be merit in exploring alternative means of supporting the production of staple crops through more sustainable techniques.

In Lesotho, agricultural policy has been concerned with national self-sufficiency rather than household

level food security. Investment in household level food production is viewed as inefficient in the context of unrestricted import of cheap South African grain. It is important for policy makers to be aware that in the mountains, where prices are higher and income generating options more limited, household production remains important. Although few households sustain themselves by their own production throughout the year, most actively cultivate their fields, and many produce food to last several months. Young people themselves expressed keen interest in learning about improved farming techniques and varieties of crop more suited to the mountain environment. Measures to support subsistence production in such communities merit investigation.

Food aid

Rather than support food production, the Lesotho government responds to food insecurity with food aid or food-for-work schemes, when food availability becomes problematic. This is a valuable safety net, but does little to assist young people to develop sustainable livelihoods in the longer term.

Land redistribution

An innovation that is allowing rural Basotho youth to produce crops to help sustain themselves is the work of land allocation committees in enabling otherwise landless youth to cultivate their own fields. This is particularly valuable to orphans, a number of whom have moved into the village due to the deaths of parents, and have lost their entitlement to land elsewhere, as well as others who fail to inherit land (including many younger sons). It is important that such opportunities are available to young unmarried men and women, who might otherwise, in the



These boys in Nihelo were fortunate to inherit a field

absence of parental support, be forced to marry in order to secure short term livelihoods. Young people



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in Nihelo have also benefited from land redistribution – specifically allocations of agricultural estate land – both directly and through some relief of pressure in this densely populated region.

Targeting

The issue of targeting of all of the forms of intervention suggested above is one that is frequently raised. Those targeted are very aware of the benefits. However, our research suggests that directly targeting young people affected by AIDS is generally inappropriate, not because AIDS has no effect, but because it is a poor predictor of vulnerability. In Nihelo, all households were poor and vulnerable. In Ha Rantelali a minority were significantly less vulnerable. These were households in which members had been employed as miners or in other relatively lucrative jobs, and which had accumulated livestock as a reserve. In many cases the miner had died leaving orphans. These children were seldom among the most needy.

It is also important that interventions targeted at children affected by AIDS do not weaken the social mechanisms through which such children currently receive care. There is a danger that targeted assistance

might appear to shift responsibility for such children from extended families to the state, or provide incentives for children to remain living apart from adult relatives. In Lesotho the Department of Social Welfare, with funding from the EU and UNICEF is developing a scheme in which small cash transfers will be made directly to orphans, on the basis that many are not provided for adequately by their foster carers. There is a risk here that such young people become seen as the responsibility of the state, rather than of families and communities.

It is also noteworthy that targeted social protection interventions often ignore the transition in an AIDS-affected household from being a household with a sick adult to being a household with orphaned children. For example, food aid to adults with AIDS, which usually benefits their children as well, stops when the adult dies. Conversely, bursaries are hard to access by poor children with dying parents, but much easier once a parent has died (by which time the child may have had to leave school). From the child's perspective it is quite illogical that he or she can start schooling but must stop eating when a parent dies.

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Project website: www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/sse/chg/projects/nvf

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