



Averting 'New Variant Famine'

Briefing Notes No 11

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AIDS-affected young people's decision making about livelihood strategies

Young people's livelihood strategies develop over time, with aspirations, plans and actions the dynamic outcomes of events and circumstances. All options carry opportunity costs.

School children's aspirations

School children in both villages aspire to formal sector careers requiring secondary education. Some Malawian school-children had more modest ambitions: repairing radios or becoming car mechanics. This difference reflects the exposure of young Malawians to diverse local opportunities, while Basotho children

rely on images propagated in school. Most children wished to continue



Most young people believe their livelihood prospects are best served by remaining in school as long as possible

education as long as possible. While many recognised their families could not afford secondary fees, they envisaged spending a few years earning money to pay for themselves. Basotho herd-boys were the only participants who had made a strategic decision to leave school, usually because they saw herding their family stock as a way to secure their futures, but sometimes at the insistence of a guardian. For most others, leaving school was precipitated by exam failure; parental sickness or death; poverty (lack of uniform, soap, school user fees); pregnancy or marriage.

Key Points:

- Most school children aspire to (usually unattainable) formal sector careers
- Most pursue education as far as possible – it is seldom a strategic livelihood decision to leave
- Once young people have left school, they often make livelihood choices in a strategic way
- The decision to marry is often aimed at enhancing livelihood prospects, particularly among young Malawian women
- Marriage confers responsibilities and alters livelihood options but does not end aspirations and plans

Livelihood decision making by school leavers

Young people make a progression of livelihood decisions after leaving school. Most expect a rural future in the long term, but some with relatives willing to accommodate them in town seek paid work, often with a view to saving money for further education or training, rather than simply to subsist. Others seize opportunities as they arise, for instance when recruiting

agents visit Nihelo. In Malawi many unmarried school leavers borrow money from parents to start small businesses – an option that is less available to AIDS-affected youth. Young people's plans at this stage are often highly strategic, taking into account relative start-up and running costs of different business options, as well as their own talents and dis/abilities.



Many young men in Ha Rantelali leave school in order to herd cattle, believing this will secure their future more effectively than education



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Deciding to marry

Deciding to marry is pivotal, and can be strategic. Men generally need to marry to access land, particularly in matrilineal southern Malawi. For Malawian women, marriage was seen as a solution to inadequate family support. Six of the eight paternally orphaned female participants aged 17+ said they married because they needed assistance. This was, however, also true of four of the eight young women deemed unaffected by AIDS. Girls in Lesotho were less enthusiastic about marriage. Nyefolo, for instance, rejected the prospect be-

cause 'most men around here don't work so it becomes difficult to eat'. Despite the livelihood drawbacks, however, few women remained unmarried for long. In contrast, only three Basotho male participants were married, reflecting the need to accumulate cattle for bridewealth, a livelihood consideration for young men. Significantly, several fatherless Basotho women had been married by men who lacked cattle, as payment of bridewealth was not required. In both countries marriage options were limited by young people's resources. In Nihelo, for instance, Rex ob-

served that he 'couldn't be picky' because, as an orphan, he had nothing to offer a wife.

Post-marriage livelihood decisions

Marriage alters available livelihood options. Most married youth aspire to more lucrative and reliable livelihoods. Many in Lesotho expressed interest in learning new skills, while Malawians planned to start or restart businesses, often by earning money through *ganyu* to invest in progressively more resource-intensive and profitable ventures.



Mafusi in Ha Rantelali shows that she does not wish to marry by crossing out a picture of a man



Agnes in Nihelo is happy that she married and has someone to help her cultivate her field

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

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