



Averting 'New Variant Famine'

Briefing Notes No 1

Updated December 2007

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

This introductory briefing provides a summary of a project being undertaken by Brunel University, UK and funded by the Department for International Development and Economic and Social Research Council, UK. The project runs for 18 months from May 2007 to October 2008. Subsequent briefings will highlight key findings of the project and will be updated on a regular basis.



Learning a livelihood

Research Context:

In tandem with the AIDS pandemic across Southern Africa, several countries have experienced recurrent food crises in recent years. This situation, in which inability to access food appears to relate more to AIDS than to environmental conditions has been labelled 'New Variant Famine'. Research is urgently needed to improve understanding of AIDS' medium-to-long-term impacts, enabling proactive approaches to anticipated challenges. Children and youth are commonly viewed as victims of the pandemic and burdens on households. While most attention has hitherto focused on orphanhood, this research

project will focus on and examine livelihoods from the point of view of AIDS-affected youth

This research project is thus intended to generate new, in-depth understanding of how AIDS, in interaction with other factors, is impacting on the livelihood activities, opportunities and choices of young people in rural southern Africa, with Malawi and Lesotho as case study countries. The insights from this project will support the development of policies and interventions that enhance AIDS-affected young people's prospects of achieving sustainable, food-secure livelihoods throughout the region.

Key Points:

- Context: Neglect of medium-to-long-term impacts of the AIDS pandemic on young people's livelihoods in research
- Aim: to investigate how AIDS, in interaction with other factors, is impacting on the livelihood activities, opportunities and choices of young people in rural Southern Africa
- Case Study Areas: two small, rural villages in Malawi and Lesotho
- Research design: ten months of participatory fieldwork with communities, households and young people

Aims and objectives

This research project aims to identify how AIDS-affected young people are incorporated into (or excluded from) current household livelihood strategies, the processes and practices that shape their access to livelihood opportunities, now and in the future, and how they make decisions about livelihoods.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate how AIDS is impacting on young people's involvement in household livelihood strategies in rural southern Africa.
2. To assess how wider institutional and policy environments condition the livelihood opportunities that are available to rural, AIDS-affected young people.

3. To elicit AIDS-affected young people's perspectives on their current situations and future prospects.

4. To improve understanding of the spatial dimensions of rural young people's livelihood responses to AIDS.

5. To generate evidence in relation to the "New Variant Famine" hypothesis.

6. To work with young people, policy makers and development practitioners to develop guidelines for appropriate policy responses and interventions to support AIDS-affected young people in achieving sustainable livelihoods.

7. To provide an innovative model that can be used for similar studies in other settings.



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CENTRE FOR HUMAN GEOGRAPHY, BRUNEL UNIVERSITY

The research

Case Study Areas

The research is based on fieldwork conducted in two rural villages of 40-50 households in Malawi and Lesotho. In Malawi, the village is located in Thyolo District, south of Blantyre. In Lesotho, a village in the Maluti Mountains, about 140 km from Maseru will be targeted. In both of these areas, previous research has been conducted by members of the research team. Livelihood options include subsistence agriculture, livestock keeping, migrant labour and various local or informal employment opportunities.

Research Design

Fieldwork in Malawi and Lesotho will be undertaken during a period of 10 months, July to December 2007 in Malawi and January to May 2008 in Lesotho. A National Steering Group (NSG) for each country will be assembled, and meet several times before and during the period of the field research to offer input to the research design, ensure relevance and consider preliminary findings. Representatives of government, NGO and donor communities, as well as researchers will be invited to join the NSGs.

The research will start with participatory community and household profiling, followed by two months of research with young people, utilising various participatory methods to encourage them to share their experiences and contribute knowledge and ideas concerning their own situations. Throughout most of the field research, a member of the research team will live in the case study villages. The information gained from these participatory methods will be complemented by policy interviews in both countries.



University of Malawi



Averting 'New Variant Famine' – Building Food Secure Rural Livelihoods with Aids-affected Young People is funded through the ESRC/DFID joint scheme (RES-167-25-0167).

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

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