



The impact of **HIV/AIDS** on land

Case studies from Kenya, Lesotho and South Africa

By Scott Drimie

There is a clear and significant link between HIV and loss of land, according to a major three-country study to determine the relationship between HIV/AIDS and land use.

HIV/AIDS not only affects the productivity of the infected, it also diverts the labour of the extended family away from productive activities as they take care of the sick. Savings are consumed and assets sold to help pay for medical expenses.

The study, commissioned by the Southern African Regional Office of the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations and co-ordinated by the HSRC, found that very high HIV infection rates have a profound impact on land use, land issues and livelihood strategies.

Conducted in Kenya, Lesotho and South Africa, the study indicated that the composition of households affected by HIV/AIDS may change.

It was found that the use of agricultural land declines as inputs become unaffordable, household labour is reduced, and dissipating wealth makes hiring labour difficult.

Sooner or later, the study found, households fall below the social and economic threshold of vulnerability, leaving the survivors – mainly the young and elderly – with limited resources.

The research revealed that under-utilisation is more common than non-utilisation. In the KwaZulu-Natal case studies, fields were often sown but only partially so.

Inadequate weeding meant that less was produced, even in relation to the smaller amount of land used. Where production might have been sufficient to meet household needs before the onset of HIV/AIDS and left a surplus for cash sales, now the level of production fell below what was necessary for household needs.

All the studies indicate a clear and significant link between HIV and loss of land

The research emphasised the importance of land rights, as HIV/AIDS affects the terms and conditions in which households and individuals hold, use and transact land. Women and children are especially vulnerable when their husbands and fathers die of HIV/AIDS; their land rights are often under threat because of rural power relationships.

The study urged that in the context of this devastating pandemic, an attempt should be made to build on existing systems and provide support services for land tenure that

underpin and support strong social networks and inter-household co-operation.

Further disruption to land systems could potentially destroy the social fabric that keeps affected households afloat. From other studies and land literature, it is evident that in many countries there is a lack of cohesion between the planning and implementation of policies and between policy makers, land officials and the communities they serve.

There is a need to galvanise research, policy and implementation to provide a more effective response to HIV/AIDS and its impact on land issues.

According to HSRC researcher Dr Michael Aliber, a follow-up project on the impact of HIV/AIDS on land rights in Kenya found that dispossession of AIDS widows had become an increasingly common problem.

‘Young widows are under pressure to return to their natal home after the husband’s death. Moreover, extended family members sometimes attempt to assert control over land of children or youth orphaned by AIDS,’ says Aliber. •

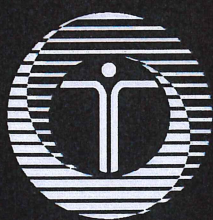
The report, *HIV/AIDS and Land: Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi & South Africa* can be downloaded from <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000158/index.php>

Dr Scott Drimie is a senior research specialist in the Integrated Rural and Regional Development research programme.

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