



## Mainstreaming HIV in the Natural Resources and Environment Sector

Since 2003, it is a policy of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) that all German Development Cooperation (GDC) programmes and projects in sub-Saharan Africa mainstream HIV, at least in countries with generalized epidemics<sup>1</sup> and especially in countries where HIV prevalence is five percent or more. Any mainstreaming HIV interventions must be planned and conducted jointly with GDC's partner organisations and be aligned with the partner country's sectoral strategies and national HIV strategy, thus adhering to the "Three Ones" principles. These require development partners to work through one national HIV strategy, one national HIV coordinating body and one national HIV Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system.

This guidance note discusses the *intersection of HIV and the natural resources and environment sector* and suggests ways in which programmes and projects in this sector can mainstream HIV.

### What is the impact of the HIV epidemic on the sector?

#### Some facts...

**Rural households across Africa rely heavily on the natural environment for their livelihoods:** Apart from using the land to raise and maintain their livestock, to grow food and cultivate cash crops, rural communities also harvest natural resources such as firewood, edible wild herbs, wild fruit, edible insects, and bush-meat for their own consumption and for income (Twine and Hunter, 2008).



#### HIV can lead to loss of land by women and children:

In many countries, women and children – including widows and orphans who lose their husbands and fathers to HIV – are by law or custom denied the right to own property. When male heads of households die, their wives and children are often evicted by relatives who claim the land and other property for themselves. This often means loss of livelihood and destitution (Izumi, 2007).

#### Further possibilities to consider in countries with very high HIV prevalence<sup>2</sup>

##### HIV can reduce productivity and impoverish

**HIV-affected families in rural areas:** HIV can induce poverty and food insecurity in rural families. Death, sickness and absenteeism can reduce family members' productivity (ILO, 2004). Caring for the sick can divert the labour of women and girls away from agriculture and tending livestock. Families may be forced to sell livestock to cover medical and funeral

<sup>1</sup>In a generalized epidemic, HIV is firmly established in the general population. Although sub-populations at high risk may continue to contribute disproportionately to the spread of HIV, sexual networking in the general population is sufficient to sustain an epidemic.

<sup>2</sup>HIV prevalence is considered „very high“ in countries where it exceeds 10 percent in the sexually active age group (15-49 years) of the general population.

expenses. As families' main bread winners die, the young and the elderly may be left behind and may have to try to make do with few or no resources at all (Hammarskjöld, 2003).

**HIV can undermine the entire economy of a country:**

Loss of labour to death and sickness and the shift from labour-intensive commercial crops to less labour-intensive subsistence crops can reduce the incomes of families and the cumulative impact can be to reduce the income of the whole country by, for example, reducing the availability of agricultural products and livestock for export.

**The transfer of traditional knowledge may be interrupted as adults die of HIV:**

When the transfer of knowledge from grandparents to parents to children breaks down, new generations may find it increasingly difficult to manage farms and livestock and make use of natural resources in an efficient and manner. This can be a major problem in areas where there are rapidly growing numbers of AIDS orphans (Hunter, 2007).

**HIV can reduce the availability of natural resources:**

If families have to sell the draft animals they use for ploughing, they may be able to plough smaller areas while previously cultivated areas turn into bush. Consequent loss of agricultural production and the loss of livestock may reduce the amount of nutritious food available to families (Hammarskjöld, 2003). Families may try to compensate by doing more hunting and fishing and charcoal making but that may reduce stocks of fish and wildlife and trees (WWF, 2007). They may use more firewood and medicinal plants to care for the sick (Barany, 2005) and more trees to make coffins for the dead. The overuse of natural resources may result in environmental degradation.

**HIV can result in the loss of human capital for land and resource management:**

The human capacity and institutional memory needed for effective land and resource management at national and local levels may be threatened by HIV (ILO, 2004). This can happen, for example, in the case of agricultural and forestry services, which may lose the capacity to provide advisory services through extension workers and, thus, the capacity to help families address the problems they face as they lose the labour and knowledge to manage their farms and wooded areas (Hunter, 2007).

**How could the activities of the sector inadvertently contribute to the spread of HIV?**

**Extension and other workers become infected by HIV and put others at risk:** Having to spend considerable time far away from their families may increase the chance that

extension and other workers will engage in risky behaviour and acquire HIV or transmit it to others (Donohoe, 2003).

**Environmental degradation may affect people's general health and increase their vulnerability to illness, including HIV-related illness.** Deforestation and unsustainable agricultural, hunting, gathering and fishing practices could lead to poverty, famine and deterioration in people's health. Women and girls may be forced to provide sexual favours in order to gain access to resources in areas they do not normally go, so they can gather wild plants, fish, game and wood for their families' consumption or for income.

**In what way could the sector contribute to curbing the spread of the HIV epidemic or to mitigating its impacts?**

**Addressing gender inequalities and the special needs of widows and orphans in the area of property ownership:** Support governments in meeting their obligations to promote and protect the rights of all vulnerable people, including widows and orphans. Support widows and orphans in the retention of access to land, livestock and other property after their husbands and fathers die. Help develop national strategies and mechanisms ensuring a human rights based approach to HIV.

**Promoting HIV prevention and awareness in the community:** Agriculture, environment, conservation and forestry organizations can use their environment and natural resource awareness programmes as entry points for HIV-prevention information, advice on positive living and messages against stigma and discrimination and property grabbing.

**Only in countries with generalized HIV epidemics and especially in countries with very high HIV prevalence**

**Advising partner institutions on the development and implementation of their HIV workplace policies:** The loss of staff working in the environment and natural resources sector due to HIV-infection can be avoided through implementation of HIV workplace policies. Such policies can cover prevention, treatment and impact mitigation and can require a working environment free from stigma and discrimination.

### **Creating an enabling environment for addressing HIV within the natural resources and environment sector:**

Advocating for the development and operationalization of sectoral policies (Drimie, 2003) – e.g., land policies, environmental policies etc. – that address HIV can lead to appropriate HIV interventions within the sector's core business.

### **Working with the communities to find alternatives to unsustainable use of natural resources and to establish natural-resource-based micro-enterprises:**

Possibilities include improving the sustainable management of medicinal plants and supporting the development of micro-enterprises that use those plants. Work in this area usually presents good opportunities to engage women in economic activities and to gain the support of their communities for doing so.

### **A GDC Example from the Ivory Coast**

The GDC-supported programme established a committee to address HIV issues within the Ivorian Office for Parks and Reserves (OIPR), the programme's implementing partner. It also supports HIV training for park managers in the water and forestry sectors. Finally, a mobile cinema is used to raise HIV awareness in villages and communities that surround the parks.

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### **Further Reading**

A selection of articles on mainstreaming HIV in the natural resources and environment sector can be found on the GDC Mainstreaming HIV internet platform at <http://sites.google.com/a/ms-hiv-gdc.org/mainstreaming-hiv-in-german-development-cooperation/Home/sectors-priority-areas/natural-resources>. To join the Group, visit <http://ms.hiv.aids.googlepages.com/home>.

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