

# Rating the impact of Aids

New measure devised to gauge household vulnerability

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The measure of devastation wrought by HIV/Aids may be impossible to quantify in human and financial terms but, using tools such as the Household Vulnerability Index, it is possible to begin measuring the effects of the epidemic on households and communities.

Developed by the Food, Agriculture and Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), the computerised tool is a statistical method measuring a household's vulnerability to the ravages of HIV/Aids, especially on agriculture and food security. The index investigates ways in which a family may be affected.

The research was made possible by a grant from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the European Union. The working project title was "Developing a Household Vulnerability Index for quantifying the impact of HIV and Aids on agriculture and food security, as a means of improving targeted impact responses". The Southern Africa Trust also provided some financial assistance to FANRPAN in developing the index.

FANRPAN was partnered by the universities of Michigan State, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe and the SADC's HIV and Aids unit.

The tool rates the family's vulnerability using three broad classifications: coping, acute and emergency. If a household is classified as coping, it means it is still able to get by. Acute means the household has been hit so hard that it badly needs assistance.

Tendayi Kureya of Development Data says an emergency is "almost a point of no return" and can be rectified only "with the best possible expertise".

The tool uses as indicators a household's access to natural assets such

as land, physical assets (such as livestock and equipment), financial assets (such as savings) and human capital assets such as farm labour.

These are assessed together and a statistical score is calculated for each household. It is possible to use the vulnerability index scores to compare households in the same community, which may prove useful for organisations such as World Food Programme and World Vision.

The stimulus for the index was the realisation of the magnitude of the epidemic and the difficulty of accurately quantifying the effects.

Research has shown that loss of labour to the epidemic in the next two decades will be between 12% and 26%. A World Food Programme report notes that HIV/Aids has already affected food security and estimates that between seven and eight million farmers have died of Aids-related diseases in the region.

A study commissioned by the Southern Africa Trust found that 24.7-million people in sub-Saharan Africa are living with HIV/Aids and that about 59% of these are women and children.

Analysts point out a direct causal relationship between the epidemic and declining agricultural output. Victor Mhoni of the Civil Society Agriculture Network in Malawi argues that much time is spent on nursing the sick and neglecting farming activities. "This [illness] creates a situation where families no longer stick to their farming calendars."

FANRPAN's work on the impact of HIV and Aids on agriculture and food security in 2004 in seven SADC countries established that HIV and Aids affected agriculture and food security, and increased household vulnerability.

Kureya argues that by being able to quantify household vulnerability, the



The Household Vulnerability Index is a tool that will help measure the impact of HIV/Aids on households, such as this household run by children in Swaziland (above), and communities. Photos: Paul Botes

government and NGOs can target the worst affected households first and, possibly, save lives. "Where a relief agency has a package of interventions, for example, food distribution, income generation or agriculture production, it is possible to use the index to decide which households qualify for which intervention, within the same community."

Kureya says that during implementation, the tool enables facilitators to "check if a household has graduated from a given level of vulnerability and thus no longer qualifies for a particular intervention and can be assigned another intervention, if available".

By categorising households, Kureya argues one can use the index to check which households require free food, which have depleted human capacities and which have physical factors to aid production.

When data is collected and analysed over time it is possible to compare trends across communities.

Kureya contends that the index is important for various reasons, especially in development work. "Not only are we able to tell who is worst affected, we even know the source of their vulnerability. We are thus able to calculate how much is required to move that household from its situation to a desired level."

The index has the inherent advantage of being a home-grown tool and takes into consideration the peculiarities and complexities that characterise the African way of life.

A vital tool to policymakers and development specialists, Kureya argues it will ensure that affected households get the appropriate form of assistance to enhance their resilience to the effects of HIV and Aids and improve their food secu-



rity and livelihoods.

Food and Security Network of Zimbabwe, World Vision and related organisations are keen to test the new tool in their programmes.

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