

WE HAVE AIDS

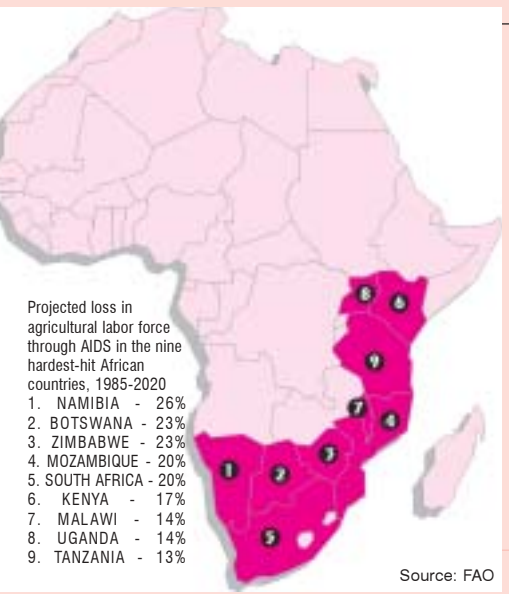
The AIDS-Food Security Spiral

The impact of AIDS on people's lives can be complex, but one clear and specific way is related to food. Food security, described as year-round access to sufficient food of appropriate nutritional value, is a basic human need. It is dependent on availability, stability, and accessibility of food supplies. All of these are diminished when HIV/AIDS enters a community.

HIV/AIDS primarily affects those aged 15 to 50 years—the bulk of the labor force. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that HIV/AIDS has killed seven million agricultural workers in Africa since 1985. It has the potential to kill 16 million more within the next 20 years. The effects of this are catastrophic.

HIV/AIDS limits the ability of households to either produce

continued...SPIRAL



COURTESY JANET JANZ

Photos from the village of Songa, Malawi.

Malawi: A Dual Disaster

BY JANET JANZ

Imagine. The food that you grow is only enough to feed your family. Then one of your family income earners dies. Another member of your household gets seriously sick and needs medicine. Add to that the money lost when time is spent caring for sick family members instead of working in the fields. Now imagine the stress of meeting the increased nutritional demands of your sick loved one while others in your family go with less food. Finally, imagine expanding your household to include your nieces and nephews who lost their parents to a deadly disease. Hard to picture? This is reality for many rural households in Malawi, Africa who depend on farming for their livelihood.

More than 80% of Malawians are subsistence farmers who grow only enough to feed their family and perhaps sell a few crops to earn a small income. It is extremely difficult for these families to meet their nutritional needs without any additional complications.

I went to Malawi a few weeks ago and visited the village of Songa. While there, I met a man named Amadu. If Amadu and his wife Esnart had only their own two children to worry about, life would be easier. But two of their widowed sisters also live with them, along with two nieces and nephews and four AIDS orphans. Amadu and Esnart's oldest daughter also has a child. In this one household there is one male, four adult women and seven children. One child weighed only 12 pounds at the age of 16 months. A week after my visit, I heard that that child had died.

continued... FAMINE

FAMINE AND AIDS in Malawi

Continued...

Amadu's granary should be full this time of year, but it only contains enough grain to last for another month. All of their chickens have already been eaten or sold. Amadu has even sold off some of their kitchen utensils to find money for food and medicine. All he can do now is look for odd jobs somewhere. Unfortunately, the job market is fiercely competitive and only the strongest, healthiest will succeed. Families affected by AIDS and HIV have little chance of competing.

People are dying of AIDS and people are dying of starvation. Now, even more people are dying due to a combination of the two. A recent study in Malawi confirmed the vicious cycle between HIV/AIDS infection and food security. Malnourishment was without a doubt highest in the areas with high prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee has two staff people based in Nairobi, Kenya. I am the Disaster Response and Preparedness Coordinator, and my colleague, Davis Omany, is the Coordinator for HIV/AIDS programs. Our work paths do not cross all that often, but they have recently.

What brings us together is this current crisis in Malawi. More than three million Malawian people face starvation this year. This crisis is not the result of just another drought. While two years of inadequate rainfall and the Malawian government's selling off of last year's food surplus are factors, more striking is the role that HIV/AIDS is playing in this famine.

The links between health and food security are widely discussed and accepted. People need enough food and nutrients to grow, develop, resist disease, and work. When their ability to access food is compromised, all kinds of effects on health result. For instance, a lack of protein can lead to reduced immunity, a lack of carbohydrates can stunt a child's growth, and a lack of certain vitamins can cause anemia, scurvy, or even blindness.

The link between HIV/AIDS and food security is not as well understood, but is becoming a common discussion topic in Malawi. One in five Malawians is infected with HIV and is without access to proper treatment. People aged 25-40—the main breadwinners of society and the ones most likely to have small children—are the most affected. A recent report in Kenya revealed that income drops by at least 30% in households where one person is infected and can't work.

In Kenya, Davis and I continue to talk about this. What can CRWRC do? What can we as Christians do? We can give food aid to help people get through this immediate food shortage. We can give seeds for next year and encourage people to farm communally so that labor needs can be met by working together. We can keep working with community groups and churches to raise awareness about the disease. We can keep thinking of new ideas. We can and we must.

Janet Janz works with CRWRC in Nairobi, Kenya.



COURTESY JANET JANZ

Amadu's almost empty granary should be full this time of year.

Spiral

Continued...

sufficient food or attend work in order to receive a wage and have the ability to purchase food. The quantity and quality of food available to a household declines as a result.

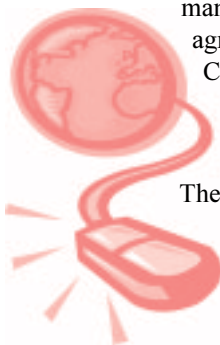
The additional burden of caring for orphans and unproductive individuals also impacts overall food security for a family. Because they have to care for sick family members, caregivers are diverted from productive activities. Productive time is also lost when people have to attend funerals. For example, agricultural extension workers in Southern Africa spend an average of 10% of their work time attending funerals, instead of providing technical support to farmers.

The cycle does not end there. Food insecurity as a result of AIDS further increases vulnerability to more HIV infection—poor nutrition contributes to poor health, low labor productivity, low income, and livelihood insecurity. These factors can induce behaviour conducive to HIV infection, such as migration for work opportunities and engaging in the commercial sex trade to earn additional income.

Adapted from ICAD Fact Sheet: HIV/AIDS and Food Security

FAO (<http://www.fao.org/Focus/E/aids/aids1-e.htm>)

The United Nations **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** has a mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, to improve agricultural productivity, and to better the condition of rural populations. Clearly, HIV/AIDS is having an impact on rural farming and poverty.



ICAD (<http://www.icad-cisd.com>)

The **Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)** is a network of over 120 Canadian international development non-governmental organizations, AIDS service organizations and individuals who are concerned about global HIV/AIDS issues.

These web sites present information related to HIV/AIDS and social justice and they challenge us to think deeply about and take action on many issues. The content, statements or links found within these sites do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or endorsement by, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action or the Christian Reformed Church.

WEB
SITES