



Securing **women's right to land and livelihoods**

a key to **ending hunger** and **fighting AIDS**



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Executive summary

In the twenty first century it is unacceptable that hundreds of millions of women struggle daily to achieve fulfilment of the most basic human needs: the need to feed themselves, the need to secure a reliable resource base, and the need to stay healthy.

Guaranteeing women's land and property rights is one of the most powerful but most neglected weapons to stem the feminisation of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

In the twenty first century it is unacceptable that hundreds of millions of women struggle daily to achieve fulfilment of the most basic human needs: the need to feed themselves, the need to secure a reliable resource base, and the need to stay healthy.

As the HIV and AIDS pandemic has spread across the globe, it has become clear that the social groups most at risk and suffering a disproportionately bigger impact are the poorest and most marginalised. Women and girls are consistently at a greater disadvantage compared to men: they are more vulnerable to HIV infection and bear the greatest burden when HIV and AIDS affect families through illness or death. Across the world, new HIV infections are higher amongst women and girls than amongst men and boys. In sub-Saharan Africa, women now account for 61 per cent of people living with HIV, up from 57 per cent in 2003¹ and young women aged 15 to 24 are more than three times as likely to be infected than young men². Globally up to 90 per cent of care due to illness is provided in homes by women and girls³.

Hunger has increased worldwide, from affecting 800 million people ten years ago to 850 million today. It is in the regions where most needs to be done and where hunger is most prevalent that the least progress has been achieved towards the UN Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger by 2015. Today, hunger is not only more severe, but is also gendered: worldwide, women make up 60 per cent of the chronically hungry. HIV prevalence is highest in the most food insecure countries, with HIV and AIDS being both a cause and a result of hunger.⁴

Rural populations are the worst affected by hunger, and their livelihoods have come under increasing stress. Rural women's ability to feed their families is severely limited by the lack of viable employment opportunities and the lack of access to markets combined with women's inferior access to productive resources, assets, credit and land. Women's access to and control over land is crucial for improving their status and reducing gender inequalities, which in turn are critical factors in reducing the prevalence of poverty, malnutrition and AIDS.

Women's farming activities, which prioritise providing food for the family, have been largely overlooked in agricultural policy. And women's rights to land and livelihoods have barely been included in HIV strategies and programmes. Although many governments have legislated for women's equitable access to land, too often this has not been accompanied by the necessary implementation or assistance to support women's farming and food production. Governments have either neglected or refused to ensure that women are able to get the necessary access to and control over land and natural resources to support food production and other livelihood needs.

¹ UNAIDS, *AIDS Epidemic Update*, December 2007

² UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 2004

³ Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, *Media Background: Care, Women and AIDS*, 2004

⁴ *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2005*. FAO

This paper highlights the link between gender inequality and HIV and AIDS, through which women's unequal social and economic status creates situations of poverty, hunger, violence and abuse. Breaking that link requires taking action on women's rights to land and livelihoods and improving women's food security. Here, we repeat longstanding calls for governments to pay attention to small-scale agriculture and in particular to women's smallholder farming and the domestic work economy. Finally, we stress the need to deal with HIV and AIDS from a human rights perspective and to break down institutional resistance to this approach.

The links between food rights and women's land rights, between HIV and food security and between HIV and gender equality are well established. This paper spotlights the ways in which the combination of gender inequality in land rights and food insecurity puts women at greater risk of HIV infection and makes it harder to mitigate the disproportionate impact of the disease on women. While the recommendations are global in nature, we acknowledge the bias towards Africa in this document, partly reflecting the lack of adequate research on these policy linkages in other regions.

The recommendations in this report focus on four priority areas that governments and the international community must act upon. Firstly, it is imperative that all agencies at national and international level improve the policy linkages between gender equality, food security and small-scale agriculture as part of a comprehensive AIDS response. Secondly, governments must fulfil their obligations to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in matters of access to and control over land and property. Thirdly, food security policies and programmes need to support the central role of women in ensuring household food security, which has hitherto been neglected. Finally, there is a need to prioritise rural women's livelihoods and develop specific measures to secure them.

Since this report was drafted, the global food price crisis is now high on the media and global political agenda. While the exact implications of higher prices vary across the world, it is clear that where prices have risen significantly, the poorest people, both in rural and urban areas, will tend to be worse off overall. In this context, the need to ensure adequate nutrition for people living with HIV and AIDS acquires even greater urgency. Good nutrition is not a cure but plays a vital role in strengthening the body's immune system, fighting opportunistic infections, and ensuring effective treatment.

ActionAid is working in many countries to improve the nutritional status of HIV-positive women in particular and renews its call for governments and policymakers to take immediate steps to ensure adequate nutrition for HIV-positive people in light of the food price crisis. This report focuses on the longer term measures needed to improve food security and nutrition for women in the context of growing hunger and a global HIV epidemic.



Brian Sokol/ActionAid

Food insecurity and the AIDS epidemic

Food insecurity continues to worsen: the number of chronically hungry people worldwide is growing by an average of four million per year at current rates.⁵ Climate change, restructuring of food and agricultural markets and production (for example, to accommodate bio-fuels) and rising food prices are likely to increase food scarcity as well as inaccessibility. Smallholder agriculture continues to suffer from disinvestment: aid to rural development has decreased by 50 per cent over the past 20 years.⁶ Smallholder agriculture is being further squeezed by the expansion of market economies and global agricultural trade.

⁵ World Food Programme, *WFP in numbers: Hunger Facts* accessed 27/02/08 (citing FAO 2006)

⁶ FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006*

It is worthwhile recalling the scale of the problem in the light of levels of under-nourishment in developing regions: 10 per cent in Latin America, 16 per cent in Asia, and 33 per cent in Africa. In Southern and East Africa, the sub-regions with the highest HIV prevalence rates, 40 per cent of the population is under-nourished.

In the context of HIV and AIDS, under-nourishment and/or malnutrition within households is extremely dangerous. Lack of adequate nutrition worsens the immunity of the body which in turn leads to greater vulnerability to AIDS. While the probability of HIV transmission is relatively low in healthy adults this 'has little applicability among poor people in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and the transition countries because they are already immuno-compromised as a result of malnutrition, parasites or other infections' (Stillwagon).⁷ Since the responsibility for feeding families falls primarily on women, they have to be at the centre of food security and nutrition efforts. This means removing the constraints that women face in ensuring that there is adequate food at the household level.

Hunger and inequality create social risk factors, particularly for poor women. Many women are driven to selling sex by hunger, poverty and the need to support their families. In such a situation, they seldom have the power to refuse sex or to insist on safe sex. Women's lack of autonomous, viable economic opportunities means that they continue to be dependent on men for their survival.

In 2007, researchers conducted a study of over 2000 women and men in Botswana and Swaziland to investigate the relationship between food insufficiency and sexual relationships. The study found that 'among women, food insufficiency was associated with approximately 70 per cent higher probability of inconsistent condom use with a non-primary partner compared with 14 per cent among men. Women who reported lacking sufficient food to eat had 80 per cent increased probability of selling sex for money or resources, a 70 per cent increased probability of engaging in unprotected sex and reporting lack of sexual control, and a 50 per cent increased probability of intergenerational sex.' The extent of the problem is exacerbated given the prevalence of food insecurity among the randomly sampled group: an average of 32 per cent of women (compared to 22 per cent of men) reported not having enough food to eat at some stage over the previous 12 months. (Weiser et al, 2007)⁸

The study shows both the gender gap between levels of food insecurity as well as gender differences in responses to food insecurity. A study from Nigeria amongst sex workers found that most were driven to sell sex as a result of poverty (expressed as the lack of food). Only 24 per cent of the sex workers used condoms regularly in every sexual act. Interviews revealed that the same factors of gender inequality, poverty and hunger that led them to become sex workers were responsible for low levels of condom use.

*It is dangerous to be talking of condoms to each and every customer. They will just abandon someone and go to another sex worker who is ready to do it without a condom. What we normally do is to charge either a higher price for those customers that want to go in without a condom relative to those ones that can use a condom.*⁹

Experiences in other countries show that where sex workers mobilise to claim collective rights, they are better able to put pressure on clients to comply with condom use. This is different from the increasing incidence of transactional sex as a result of collapsed livelihoods and hunger, which is the situation for most women. Bryceson makes the observation in a study from Malawi that:

"it is important to distinguish [sex workers] from women who engage in occasional transactional sex. The latter are not professionals selling sex as an occupation. They

⁷ Stillwagon E. *The Ecology of Poverty: Nutrition, Parasites and Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, AIDS, Poverty and Hunger: Challenges and Responses*. Gillespie S. (Ed.), Chapter 9. IFPRI 2006

⁸ Weiser SD, Leiter K, Bangsberg DR, Butler LM, Percy-de Korte F, et al. (2007) *Food insufficiency is associated with high risk sexual behavior among women in Botswana and Swaziland*. PLoS Medicine, October 2007, Vol. 4 (10), e260

⁹ Oyefara J.L., *Food insecurity, HIV/AIDS pandemic and sexual behaviour of female commercial sex workers in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria*, Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS, Vol. 4 No. 2 August 2007

happen into chance sexual encounter, compromised by their impoverished circumstances and their households need for food, and are ill equipped to bargain the terms of the transaction. Given this disempowerment and the unpredictable nature of transactional sex, the adoption of safe sex practices is problematic.”¹⁰

While we have emphasised that hunger fuels the spread of HIV, the virus is equally a cause of hunger and poverty in households, with repercussions that are well documented. For rural households the impact of illness and death on livelihoods may include loss of income and assets, loss of labour and a decline in family production. For women, the death of a spouse might mean outright dispossession and the loss of access to land and other property.

An important point made by Gillespie¹¹ is that the impacts of HIV depend on a complex set of factors. For many communities, HIV is ‘one of among many concurrent stresses’, and many populations where HIV is prevalent have to deal with ‘overlapping vulnerabilities’. Faced with multiple vulnerabilities and stresses, women are forced to adopt short term ‘coping strategies’ at the risk of their long term health.

¹⁰ Bryceson D. F. and Fonseca. J. *An Enduring or Dying Peasantry? Interactive Impact of Famine and HIV/AIDS in Malawi. AIDS, Poverty and Hunger: Challenges and Responses*. Gillespie S. (Ed.), Chapter 5. IFPRI 2006

¹¹ Gillespie S. *AIDS, Poverty, and Hunger: An Overview. AIDS, Poverty and Hunger: Challenges and Responses*. Gillespie S. (Ed.), Chapter 9. IFPRI 2006



Stuart Freidman

Barriers to women's farming

Women are responsible for between 60 and 80 per cent of food production in developing countries.¹² Gender inequality and socio-cultural norms determine women's role in producing and securing food for the family, as well as what resources they have at their disposal to produce food, what food they can produce and who consumes the food that they produce. Women are disproportionately burdened with having to secure food, as well as most other aspects of household tasks including securing water, fuel and firewood, processing crops and preparing food. Despite their central role in providing food for households and the heavy workload incurred, women have relatively little control over the resources needed to conduct these tasks. As noted in a study on food security, gender inequality and food production in two districts in Kenya and Tanzania:

¹² FAO, FAO Focus: Women and Food Security. www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/Women/Sustin-e.htm

'While the role of men in food securing activities tends to be minimal in comparison to women, their role in decision-making about what food should be produced, what food should be consumed, and what food should be sold was substantial. Women clearly do the majority of the work related to food security, yet their capacity to make independent decisions about such issues is limited. Most women indicated that they had little authority to make decisions about food production, consumption or sale, independently of their husband.'¹³

This study like others found that food security in poor households is improved where women have secure and autonomous control over resources such as land, where they are able to benefit from agricultural support programmes and where they are able to organise in collectives.

A study on women's access to and control over land in Ghana showed that both women and men associated women's increased access to and control over land with food security and household well being:

'More than four-fifths of the respondents (87%) stressed that if women were to gain greater access to land this would be beneficial to the households. It would contribute to: a) an increase of food supply at the household level (27% of the responses), b) an increase of the household income (27% of the responses) and c) an improved family welfare (25% of the responses). Male respondents highlighted the improved family welfare, whereas female respondents emphasised the increase in food supply for the household. A mere thirteen percent of the respondents indicated that an increased access of female household members to land would make no difference to the family welfare, and four percent indicated that a greater control of female household members over land would have a negative impact, as it would deprive others of land or the agricultural production would decrease due to bad farm management.'¹⁴

According to one IFPRI study, women and men farmers are equally productive, but women's productivity

increases dramatically when they are given inputs equivalent to those received by males.

Even where rural women have land, however, their ability to cultivate it will be constrained by an already heavy work burden and by lack of access to additional labour or labour-saving technologies. This problem has become more acute where AIDS has resulted in the death of a family member, or where women have to spend time looking after the sick rather than tending their fields, or where women are themselves affected by HIV/AIDS and are too ill to work.

Rural women's ability to ensure enough food for their families is not only constrained by discriminatory socio-cultural norms, but also by policy neglect and gender blindness in policy making. Although most governments claim that food security is a priority in agricultural policies, this is not borne out in reality. Generally, small-scale farming been overlooked in favour of commercial farming, and food production has received less investment than cash crop production. Infrastructure projects have focused on large commercial concerns for exports, rather than on providing better economic opportunities for small rural producers.

In Ethiopia, the following constraints for new women landowners who had received land in redistribution programmes were raised as issues for advocacy:¹⁶

- Women are not included in training activities or provided with improved seeds and fertilisers
- Women land-owners do not plough due to the lack of oxen and ploughing tools and because this practice is not culturally accepted
- Women depend on men to do their ploughing and have to give up to three quarters of their land or produce in payment

¹³ Hyder A. A., *The pervasive triad of food security, gender inequity and women's health: Exploratory research from sub-Saharan Africa*. African Health Sciences Vol 5 (4) Dec. 2005. Makerere Medical School. Uganda 2005

¹⁴ Duncan B. A and Brants C., *Access to and Control Over Land From a Gender Perspective: A Study Conducted in the Volta Region of Ghana*, 2004

¹⁵ Quisumbing A. R and Meinzen-Dick R. *Empowering Women to Achieve Food Security: Overview*. 2020 Focus 6, Brief 1, August 2006, IFPRI

¹⁶ Shashi Demessie, *Women's Access to Land During Land Redistribution in the Amhara Region*. Workshop Paper. Women and Land in Africa: Culture Religion and Realising Women's Rights. Wanyeki L.M. (ed). Zed Books 2003.

- Decreased production may result because men plough women's land after ploughing their own
- Because of meagre incomes received, some women are inclined to rent their land thereby losing the sense of ownership and the prestige that goes with it
- Due to a lack of formal education and access to information, many women cannot read written rental agreements and renters then deny oral agreements.

The lack of public investment in small-scale food production generally is compounded by an even worse neglect of women farmers. Targeting women as beneficiaries of agricultural technology and inputs, and increasing literacy have been shown to be key factors in raising productivity amongst women.

Rural women provide most of the work in small-scale labour intensive agriculture and the proportion of women-headed households reaches almost one-third in some developing countries. Yet women receive only five per cent of extension services worldwide, and women in Africa access only one percent of available credit in the agricultural sector¹⁷

¹⁷ HIV, Gender and Food Security. Gender and HIV/AIDS Factsheets No 14, UNAIDS <http://www.genderandaids.org/downloads/events/Fact%20Sheets.pdf>

The Partnership for Food Security (PAFOSE), Uganda

The PAFOSE project was created to address issues of household food insecurity in HIV-affected households. It brought together organisations with expertise in HIV and AIDS, agriculture, nutrition and gender. The partnership involved the National Agricultural Research Organisation; AIDS support organisations and the International Centre for Research on Women. The project designed a methodology which would integrate learning technical skills and knowledge sharing in agricultural production, with sensitisation on food security, household gender relations and HIV and AIDS. The project lent equal importance to changing social norms as to introducing new technical and technological production strategies among farmers groups. By integrating the different issues in a single process, AIDS community workers and agricultural extension agents were able to improve skills learning and help bring about positive changes in social norms. Participatory methodologies enabled trainers to conduct group activities on sensitive topics such as HIV and AIDS and gender.

'Before PAFOSE, an NGO might come and give a sensitisation on gender. Then nine months later, another would come sensitising on production, but by then we had forgotten what was being said about gender and so we couldn't see the connections.'

The project enabled discussion on gender relations and food security, raising issues such as women's workload and joint decision-making on household resources. The project reported various changes in terms of gender relations, including men taking women's agricultural skills more seriously, joint planning around use of family produce, breaking rigid barriers in gendered divisions of labour and better household planning around food use.

'Before PAFOSE, husbands ignored cultivating sweet potatoes because they regarded it as women's work. But these days, they work to her. Husbands and wives together open the ground, heap and plant.'

'At first [men doing women's work] felt shameful. But [people] soon realised that these were the real issues preventing enough food, so men came around. Men realised that all the burden is on women. So today, some of the families have changed and men are working in a new way.'

Source: *Transcending boundaries to improve the food security of HIV-affected households in rural Uganda: A Case Study*, Coon, Katharine, Jessica Ogden, John Odolon, Anthony Obudi-Owor, Charles Otim, James Byakigga, and Peter Sebanja. 2007. Horizons Final Report. Washington, DC: Population Council. 2007

Smallholder farming, critical to providing for family food needs, has received the least attention of all. One reason for this is that it is 'feminised' and considered to be part of domestic work rather than an economic activity. As is the norm with all 'women's work', it is undervalued, and yet women's domestic work (including smallholder farming) is concerned mainly with feeding and care giving, both of which are critical in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Policy makers also look down on smallholder farming as inferior or backward compared to commercial or cash-crop farming, yet for many rural communities women's smallholder farming is the starting point of food security. It is vital that governments consider women's smallholder production as an important part of agriculture in its own right. In many communities, women and men are responsible for producing different crops that are associated with different needs, while traditionally defined 'women's livelihoods' require access to different resources, such as trees and fruit, water or livestock, associated with their reproductive roles. Agricultural support programmes tend to neglect women's interests and needs: for example, women may wish to invest more in the production of traditional or indigenous crops or in natural resources that do not have great market value but are important for family food needs. In other instances, agricultural extension workers have deliberately colluded with men to prevent women from accessing such services, as found in a study from Cote d'Ivoire, so that men would still be able to command women's labour in their cotton fields.¹⁸

Women's smallholder production may be further threatened when certain crops attain commercial value, as in the case of horticulture, when men take over production of such crops. Smallholder farming may also be threatened where land acquires new economic value, for example as a result of irrigation schemes, resulting in women's loss of access to land for domestic production. And yet women's smallholder farming is vital for food security: IFAD's study of projects in Nepal and parts of India highlighted the importance of maintaining a smallholder base even as households diversified into other crops or into non-farm income, particularly in already vulnerable households.¹⁹ The study found that smallholder farming also provided some level of security against shocks. Food security was particularly problematic in households where smallholder farming had been reduced as a result of losing endowments such as land, labour and livestock.

In many countries, smallholder farming no longer meets family food needs adequately as a result of government neglect of this critical agricultural sub-sector. Consequently, women and men are shifting from producing on their own land for their own income and consumption, to working as labourers on wealthier farmers' land. Shifting from smallholder to waged employment may have benefited some women workers, as indicated in cases in Latin America, but in many parts of Asia and Africa, farm work tends to be amongst the lowest paid and most insecure occupations, with little social protection and high levels of exploitation. For many women, farm work is no guarantee of adequate income to cover their food and nutrition needs, and there are very few other livelihood options.

In Malawi, it was observed that the ganyu system (where farmers take on casual work in return for money) has meant less time given to smallholder food production. Since the 2002 famine, ganyu is increasingly accompanied by pressure to offer sex as well as labour. Women's distress sales of labour were attributed directly to policy failures in the agricultural sector, particularly agricultural liberalisation, and withdrawal of fertiliser subsidies which left women small-scale farmers unable to obtain a livelihood from cultivating their own land and growing their own food.²⁰

Agricultural policy, land reform efforts and HIV policy should work hand in hand to support women's smallholder farming and ensure that women have the necessary access to and control over land, natural resources, productive inputs and technologies to ensure food self sufficiency in households.

¹⁸ Basset T. "Women's Cotton and the Spaces of Gender Politics in Northern Cote d'Ivoire" 2002. *Gender, Place and Culture* 9(4): 351-370

¹⁹ Rahman Osmani S., *Food Security, Poverty and Women: Lessons from Rural Asia*, IFAD (publication date unknown) www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/rural/rural_exe.htm

²⁰ Bryceson D. F. and Fonseca. J. *An Enduring or Dying Peasantry? Interactive Impact of Famine and HIV/AIDS in Malawi*. AIDS, Poverty and Hunger: Challenges and Responses. Gillespie S. (Ed.), Chapter 5. IFPRI 2006



Women's land rights

A piece of land for peace of mind

Nyaradzo Makambanga tried to leave her husband once. He had been having relations with other women and was rarely at home. Her family insisted she stay with him, because they could not afford to return the 'lobola' (bride price) he had paid for her. But in 1998, when she became ill, her husband told her to leave and refused to support her. Eventually her brother gave her the money to get medical help and she spent three months in a hospital, where she tested positive for HIV.

"I was shattered. My hopes and dreams had come to an end. I thought I was going to die and leave my children," Makambanga remembers. Then she heard about the Network of Zimbabwean Positive Women and its 'Women, Violence and HIV/AIDS' programme. "All the time I was married I did not know that I was being abused. Now I can talk about it," said Makambanga. With new-found confidence, and with the understanding that she actually had the right to own land, she asked her village chief for a plot to farm. The chief agreed and, with a loan from the Network's revolving fund, Makambanga bought seeds and began planting.

Makambanga receives medical help for opportunistic diseases through the Network, as well as skills training and emotional and economic support. She also works with other women to teach them their rights. "I would not want to see other women go through the difficulties I went through because of ignorance. If I had known that even though I was married I had my own rights, I would not have ended up being HIV-positive," Makambanga said. "What women need is peace of mind and a piece of land to cultivate and be equal to men."

Network of Zimbabwean Positive Women, 2000, *"Progress Report to UNIFEM Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women"*, April-September 2000, p. 9; Actionaid Alliance, June, 2002 *Speaking Out: On HIV and AIDS*, Brussels

Land is important for improving women's livelihood as well as their social status. Although women constitute the majority of the agricultural workforce (70-80 per cent in some regions) their access to and control over land is globally estimated at 5 per cent,²¹ although there are variations in regions. The high levels of exploitation, abuse and violence experienced by women, as well as inequalities in levels of education and access to public services are directly linked to their inferior economic status vis-à-vis men. For the majority of the poor, who are in the rural areas, land is the most important economic resource and women's unequal access to and control over land has significant bearing on their economic status and enjoyment of their basic rights.

*'Land rights increase women's power in social, economic, and political relationships. Rural women claim that secure land rights increase their social and political status, and improve their sense of self-esteem, confidence, security, and dignity. By diminishing the threat of eviction or economic destitution, direct and secure rights to land can increase women's bargaining power in their families and participation in public dialogue and local political institutions.'*²²

Most rural families in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia live under customary regimes – access to land is determined by customary practices, with land use and the proceeds from land owned by male kin. Women's relationship with land is therefore through husbands, fathers, brothers or sons. Although land markets are growing, inheritance (or in some systems gifts/loans) is the main means by which rural households might acquire land. Women's inheritance rights are generally unequal to those of men, and in some cases non-existent. Women mainly gain access to land through marriage, although they might be apportioned land as daughters or sisters. Even in matrilineal societies,

access to land is largely controlled by a women's male kin (uncles, fathers, brothers, etc). Women's access to and control over land is therefore dependent on negotiating these usually unequal power relationships, rather than as a general entitlement as would be the case for men.

Women's previous entitlements to land under customary regimes (usually user rights) have continuously been weakened as a result of changes to land holding systems over periods of colonialism, post-independence land redistribution and, most recently, land privatisation processes. The problem has arisen from the fact that these exercises have been 'gender blind' and therefore have not taken account of women's interests in land or of their existing claims.

Customary regimes become most insecure when changes to land administration are introduced and 'more powerful individuals – usually men – fare better when the content of custom is subject to new negotiation in new institutional arenas.'²³ The new environment provides the impetus for a shake-up of entitlements to and control of resources, and in some cases the sides in the ensuing contest are defined by gender. It is in this context that women are less able to lay claim to land. Although women's secondary claims to ownership (user rights) can be formally recognised in the land registration process, they have tended to lose out to men in the negotiation of titles because they are unable to participate equally with men in the actual process of institutional reform. The wider, traditional social context with its inequalities is often overlooked by those pushing land reforms.

Recent land reform policies encouraged and supported by the World Bank have stressed land registration and titling for increased security of tenure for the poor. The argument for land privatisation and titling has been that a regime of secure property rights, and the creation of land markets where land can be bought and sold or used as collateral, will boost economic growth. However, studies do not find any evidence that land privatisation processes either increase investment in the

²¹ A Gender Perspective on Land Rights. FAO. www.fao.org

²² Crowley E. *Land Rights*. 2020 Focus 6 (Empowering Women to Achieve Food Security), Brief 1, August 2001

²³ Yngstrom I. *Women, Wives and Land Rights in Africa: Situation Gender Beyond the Household in the Debate over Land Policy and Changing Tenure Systems*. Oxford Development Studies, Vol 30 No 1, 2002. Carfax Publishing.

land or offer increased access to credits and loans. What has broadly emerged, though, is evidence that land titling and registration processes have been detrimental to women's interests, particularly given that titles are registered in the name of the 'head of the household.

While women may have weaker rights under customary tenure, land privatisation and markets will not necessarily solve the problem as poor women's ability to acquire adequate land through the market is often remote. Joint titling may work in some instances for women, but women have to be in a position to defend their claims through the law or through land administration structures where individuals might be biased against women, or which tend to be inaccessible to many rural women.

Tenure security is a situation where, regardless of the particular tenure regime, women 'can use or manage land in a predictable fashion for a defined length of time'. Three components of tenure security are suggested as benchmarks for women:²⁴

- Clarity in the duration and content of rights
- Independent control
- Ability to defend and enforce rights.

If changes to land policy are to uphold women's tenure security, the social disruption caused by the HIV and AIDS pandemic must be taken into account. Studies have established that rather than the strength of their entitlements, for women the most effective protection against dispossession has been their social relationships and networks.²⁵ As a result of the strain on society brought by HIV and AIDS, women will be further exposed to challenges to their land claims both in their marital and natal homes unless their rights to land are declared in law.

Finally, there is the issue of overall landlessness and land scarcity, which affects millions of poor rural people. With globalisation, new economic opportunities are being created for business elites and multinationals, creating new pressures on 'public' and traditional lands, and increasing the concentration of land in the hands of the privileged. Women's land rights need to be tackled within a framework of equitable land distribution. This point was made by a contributor in an ActionAid e-discussion on women's land rights:

In Nepal we are talking about a country where almost 29 per cent of the population do not own any land; 47 per cent of the land owners own on average 0.5 hectares of land and 5 per cent of the creamy layers own 37 per cent of land. Men own 92 per cent of these holdings. [...] If we talk of making this a land ownership transfer issue alone it would be limited to the elites; while if we talk of land reform/redistribution and ensuring compulsory women's ownership at that stage then that would make sense in our case.²⁶

²⁴ Cowley E. op. cit

²⁵ Crowley E. *Land Rights*. 2020 Focus 6 (Empowering Women to Achieve Food Security), Brief 1, August 2001

²⁶ Yngstrom I. *Women, Wives and Land Rights in Africa: Situation Gender Beyond the Household in the Debate over Land Policy and Changing Tenure Systems*. Oxford Development Studies, Vol 30 No 1, 2002. Carfax Publishing.

Economic empowerment

Land rights are relevant to the fight against HIV and AIDS because they strengthen women's economic standing and bargaining power within households and communities.

HIV infection is spreading most rapidly in the 15 to 24 age-group, with infection rates growing faster amongst adolescent women. Young women are particularly targeted for sexual exploitation, abuse and violence: the lack of economic opportunities and unequal access to productive resources are major contributing factors. Young men and young women are both affected by the collapse in rural livelihoods, but the impact on young women is different because they do not have the same entitlements to family resources and assets in their natal homes as young men.

Economic empowerment gives women more opportunities to opt out of unequal and violent relationships and/or to insist on consensual and safe sex with partners. In rural areas, land is the primary asset of households, and therefore economic and socio-political equity must begin with land.

*'Research suggests that women who own property or otherwise control economic assets have higher livelihoods, a secure place to live, greater bargaining power within their households and can better protect themselves against domestic violence and having to exchange sex to meet their essential economic needs. With greater ownership and control over economic assets women are empowered to negotiate abstinence, fidelity, safer sex and can avoid exchanging sex for money food or shelter.'*²⁷

²⁷ Economic Security for Women Fights AIDS, What's Real Issue #3
UNAIDS/Global Coalition on Women and AIDS.
<http://womenandaids.unaids.org>

Securing land rights for women allows them to diversify their livelihood strategies so that they are not dependent on smallholder farming. This may not always be easy, but land rights provide women with a start. When women own land, they have better access to productive support as they are considered farmers. They are secure on their land and feel more confident to invest for the long term. Their land can also serve as a base for other types of economic activity. Livelihood projects that ensure women can produce from their land are needed, particularly for families that have already been impoverished by HIV and AIDS.

ICRW's research in South Asia²⁸ noted a number of economic benefits that women enjoyed as a result of owning their own land and property. These included:

- Greater role in household decision making and resource allocation
- Saving for the future
- Giving property to daughters
- Increasing confidence about their future and their children's future
- Greater mobility and social support
- Support from in-laws

²⁸ *International Center for Research on Women, Property Ownership & Inheritance Rights of Women for Social Protection – the South Asia Experience. Synthesis Report of Three Studies. ICRW 2006*

Social empowerment

Aside from livelihood issues, land rights remain important for women because, historically, land has had both economic and social value.

For rural communities and for women, land is as much a social good as it is an economic good. Land which is communal is used collectively by women to build community solidarity and cooperation. Land provides a place to stay and to raise children, and is therefore important for social reproduction in rural areas. Building a sense of self worth and self esteem amongst women, particularly young women, creates new behaviours and attitudes and reduces risks and vulnerabilities. Households afflicted by HIV and AIDS depend very much on community support which in turn demands that families are able to experience some level of security and stability.

For many of the historically disadvantaged population groups, particularly those in rural areas, land rights are not primarily marketable assets but rather a secure base on which to shelter and nurture their families and to develop their livelihood strategies.

Although rural income in many countries has become less dependent on agriculture, land continues to be a crucial resource for the survival and reproduction of rural populations. And as rural households become more feminised, land is gaining a new significance as a secure place to raise families and as a base for diversified livelihood strategies. When members of rural families migrate to urban or industrial areas in search of wage labour, they continue to rely on the support of the family they left

*behind. When they are unemployed, the family home and land is often able to reabsorb them until they find waged work again. Family land in the village provides all family members with a place where they belong and can always return to. In economies where employment is unstable, unemployment is high and where industries come and go, this point of stability is materially, socially and psychologically important.*²⁹

The value of land as a social good is important in the context of HIV and AIDS. Women are being mobilised as community caregivers for HIV and AIDS and to fill in the gaps where social welfare has failed, but the precariousness of their lives brought about by HIV and AIDS and gender inequality means that much of this 'social capital' is lost. Women's own initiatives to reduce the impacts of HIV and AIDS depend on social networks which are built over time within their communities and families. Community-based programmes to confront AIDS usually combine livelihood as well as awareness and counselling services. Women's status in the community, enhanced when they have secure land rights, means they are better able to find ways to combat and mitigate HIV and AIDS in their communities. Securing land rights for women would dramatically alter the insecurity, disempowerment and abuse that are associated with poverty and inequality, and would create new fronts for rolling back HIV and AIDS.

²⁹ FAO, *Gender and land compendium of country studies*, FAO Rome 2005.

The land is ours!

It is 7.30 am in the village of Narsenahalli, near Doddballapur, about 45 kilometres outside the Indian city of Bangalore. A group of around 30 women aged between 25 and 80 have assembled on the front veranda of the brightly-coloured school that doubles up as a community meeting point.

The women of Narsenahalli are here to talk about land. They have been working on the land for the last 30 years, and readily admit they've been farming on gomal land, low quality land set aside by the government as wasteland.

The women grow dryland crops such as groundnut, red gram and the local cereal ragi -- most of it for home consumption. But they also earn a small amount of money by making plates from sal leaves collected from the nearby forests and selling them at the local market. While the women work on the land, the men travel to look for work.

According to estimates by Bina Agarwal, an academic researching and writing about women and land rights, almost half of the land in India is now farmed by women. The changes mean that in the rural areas the vast majority of women -- around 85% -- are now farmers. Agarwal points out that although what she calls the 'feminisation of agriculture' is taking place at a rapid pace, there has been less of a shift in cultural attitudes towards women.

According to her research, India's inherently patriarchal mindset has not adjusted rapidly enough or questioned whether the women have rights to own the title deeds to the lands they farm.

Although the women of Narsenahalli may be typical of this pattern, what is extraordinary is that they are one of the first groups of women to challenge the status quo and demand the right to own the title deeds to the land they cultivate.

Today the women are organised and form an all-women village unit to deal with land issues as part of a larger organisation, the Karnataka People's Forum for Land Rights (KPFLR), which was formed in 2001 to campaign for land reform.

“We want our pattas. It is our right,” say the majority of women on the school veranda, as though rehearsed, referring to the title deeds to their plots of land.

If they have access to land, they can provide food for the family instead of needing money to buy it. With enough food coming in, they have time to look for other ways of earning money, by making and selling leaf plates, for example. This means they are able to buy clothes, school books or medicine.

Bina Agarwal's research demonstrates the link between women's ownership of land and wealth creation, partly because they can manage the crops, fodder and trees themselves, and partly because they can also access credit and mortgages for themselves. Where land is owned and managed by women, there are signs that they use it as collateral to borrow money to start up micro-businesses which generate a steady income. The women also grow in confidence and demand services from the government for themselves and their children.

Back in the small village of Narsenahalli, there is a growing sense amongst the women about the benefits of owning the title deeds to the land they cultivate. There may be a long way to go until equal rights to own land become a reality throughout India, but what is happening in Karnataka may be the start of something big.

Excerpt - Panos Features, 2006³⁰

³⁰ Acharya, K., *The Land is Ours*, PANOS Features 2006 Source
www.infochangeindia.org/features368.jsp

Violence against women

The 'Women Won't Wait' campaign to end HIV and violence against women is vigorously pushing for greater recognition of violence against women and girls as a critical driver of increasing HIV prevalence amongst women.

*Violence, or the threat of it, not only causes physical and psychological harm to women and girls, it also limits their access to and participation in society because the fear of violence circumscribes their freedom of movement and of expression as well as their rights to privacy, security and health.*³¹

The ICRW study on women's property ownership and social protection in South Asia also explored whether and how women's ownership of land and/or a house protects women from domestic violence.³² Overall the studies, which were undertaken in two states in India (Kerala and West Bengal) and in Sri Lanka showed that women who owned property experienced less violence, which already points to the need to act on women's access to and control over land and other assets and resources. However, the study also affirmed the pervasiveness of violence, with 35 per cent reporting at least one incident of physical violence and 64 per cent reporting the experience of psychological violence.

'Women who owned land or a house, are at significantly lower risk of physical and psychological violence both long term and current. For instance, among the

³¹ Fried S. *Women Won't Wait Campaign; Show Us the Money: is violence against women on the HIV&AIDS donor agenda?* Action Aid; 2007. www.womenwontwait.org

³² International Center for Research on Women, *Property Ownership & Inheritance Rights of Women for Social Protection – the South Asia Experience*. Synthesis Report of Three Studies. ICRW 2006

property-less, 49.1 percent experience long term physical violence. In contrast, those who owned both land and house reported dramatically less physical and psychological violence (6.8 and 16.4 percent respectively.)'

The increase in the number of HIV-positive women is mostly a result of infection by their husbands. Within marriage traditional gender roles that stress women's submissiveness and inferiority are still strong and women lack sexual autonomy and economic independence. As a result, women continue to be subjected to violence, have less control over family resources and are excluded from decision making.

In many countries, including several with high rates of HIV infection, girls are married in their teens as a poverty reduction strategy. However, recent studies in Africa indicate that young married women are at higher risk of HIV infection than their unmarried counterparts. A study in Kisumu, Kenya, found that 33 per cent of married girls were HIV-positive, compared to 22 per cent of sexually active unmarried girls of the same age. In Ndola, Zambia, 27 per cent of married girls were HIV-positive, compared to 16 per cent of unmarried girls. The Kisumu study also found that adolescent girls who were married to much older men - a common occurrence - were more

likely to be HIV-positive. Half of the married women whose husbands were 10 or more years older were infected with HIV, compared to none of the women whose husbands were up to three years older. Researchers have posited that the increased risk is linked to older men's increased sexual experience and exposure to HIV, and young wives' inability to make demands on older husbands.³³

Increasing women's sexual autonomy is critical to decreasing their risk to HIV. While economic security does not entirely guarantee women's protection from violence, it increases women's ability to insist on consensual and safe sex and to leave abusive and violent relationships.

³³ *Confronting the Crisis*

Inheritance rights and property grabbing

Violations of land and inheritance rights through property grabbing are two of the most widespread violations of women's rights. AIDS has made widowhood a common reality and exacerbated the risk of women's land and property dispossession. The culprits are generally the relatives of deceased husbands. Even though many women may be able to defend their rights to land, widowhood may still result in loss of property such as livestock or farm implements. Threats of dispossession, abuse or violence to widows are also widely reported in studies.³⁴ To give a sense of the magnitude of the problem, an FAO study in Namibia found that 44 per cent of widows lost cattle, 28 per cent lost small livestock, and 41 per cent lost farm equipment in disputes with in-laws after the death of a husband.³⁵

Governments have not seriously addressed the problem of property and land grabbing from women and girls as a human rights violation and a cause of poverty amongst women and girls. Firstly, many governments have refused to reform laws that continue to prevent women from enjoying the same rights to land as men. Secondly, governments have done little to combat societal attitudes that deny women and girls equal status with their brothers, husbands or sons in relation to land rights and inheritance rights.

While dispossession of widows happens whether the cause of death is HIV or not, widows interviewed in Zimbabwe in research on HIV and AIDS and women's inheritance rights indicated that 'the HIV and AIDS status of women was an aggravating factor in causing the dispossession of women and property disputes. Accusations that the widows had bewitched husbands who had died of AIDS, had brought the disease into the family in the first place or did not require large tracts of land because they themselves were sick, were frequently used to justify the eviction and dispossession of women.'³⁶

A number of categories of widowed women need special attention. Many women are widowed at a young age because of HIV and AIDS. Research from Zimbabwe and Kenya indicates that their inheritance rights are more likely to be violated than those of older women. Again, this is due to the fact that women's

³⁴ *The land and property rights of women in the context of HIV and AIDS: case studies from Zimbabwe*. K. Izumi (Ed.), FAO/Global Coalition on Women and AIDS. Human Sciences Research Council, 2006

³⁵ Women and Aids: 2004 update. UNAIDS, 2005, www.unaids.org/wad2004/EPIupdate2004_html_en/Epi04_04_en.htm

³⁶ Izumi K. op cit.

ability to hold on to their property after widowhood is dependent on their social networks within the community, which younger women would not have had time to establish. Women's land rights are also more likely to be violated where widows are childless, since for many women their right to remain on matrimonial property is as mothers of the deceased's children. Finally, younger women and orphaned girls are also likely to lose their inheritance rights to brothers or uncles.

A 2006 study of the impact of HIV and AIDS on women and girls in six states of India highlighted the extremely low status of HIV positive widows³⁷. They are stigmatised

twice over, as a widow and as an HIV positive woman, and face dispossession and economic impoverishment. Most HIV positive widows are young. Nearly 60 per cent are less than 30 years of age and another one third are in the 31 to 40 age group. Widow households are much worse off than the other HIV households in terms of availability of basic amenities and ownership of assets. Of those who have been widowed, 90 per cent left or were thrown out of the marital home, and 79 per cent complain that they were denied a share in their husband's property.

³⁷ *Gender Impact of HIV and AIDS in India*, NACO, NCAER and UNDP 2006. www.undp.org.in

Biting the feeding hand

Kokop Kisa lives in Yatui village. She has been landless since 1983, when government resettled people in some villages including hers. In 1993 the village she lived in was gazetted as a national park and now park rangers are harassing villagers to leave. Her first husband died when they were still living in the moorlands where they were not allowed to cultivate the land. When he died, she did not inherit anything because culturally it simply could not happen. She was inherited by another man and became his second wife. (Widow inheritance is still a common practice in this part of Uganda.) During this time, the government resettled all families including hers on smaller pieces of land than where they lived before. Her husband later died, leaving her with one child. Because she was a second wife, Kokop did not benefit in any way from that marriage. The older children even chased her away, saying she had no right to the property in the home. Kokop was later inherited by a third man, who was later shot dead during a fight with his relatives over a cow. When she was about to be inherited by a fourth man, a relative took pity on her and gave her a piece of land which she now calls her own. 'I have grown old and no one admires me now. I have also grown weaker. I have problems with my leg and moving is becoming increasingly difficult. I do not know what lies ahead for me. I have come a long way and no one respects what I have been through,' she says. Kokop has eight children and lives with all of them on her relative's land. She will not move again. 'If women were also allowed to own land, I would have got my own piece of land. I hope that my children will live a better life than me,' she says.

'Biting the Feeding Hand' Uganda Land Alliance, ActionAid 2005

Even in countries where statutory law establishes women's inheritance rights, women may not have access to justice systems, may not be aware of their rights, or, as is often reported, will not resort to legal systems because they fear violence and harassment or prefer not to create tensions with families.

The arguments for women's land, livelihood and property rights to be part of the battle against HIV and AIDS are therefore multiple: rights provide security and protection against violence and dispossession, allow women control over their sexuality and choices, meet basic needs such as food and shelter and provide women with an income and a home.

While attitudes and practices related to women's land rights are often deeply entrenched, they can and are changing. Examples from the field provide useful insights

about how such changes might occur. Wide-ranging research on women's land rights in Africa offers some examples. In the Amhara region of Ethiopia, 32.7% of the beneficiaries of land redistribution were women. The policy targeted women engaged in small trading and single women. In addition to guaranteeing women tenure security, the study notes that the new policy meant that 'those who were previously engaged as daily labourers could earn income from their land.'³⁸ In Uganda, a study noted an emerging trend of parents considering allocating land to their daughters. 'Fathers' decisions to give daughters shares of land is premised on the married daughters' lack

³⁸ Demessie, Shashie, *Women's Access to Land During Land Redistribution in Amhara Region (workshop presentation)*. Wanyeki, L. M. (ed), *Women and Land in Africa: Culture, Religion and Realising Women's Rights*. Zed Books 2003

of security and control over their husband's land, and the lack of confidence that fathers have in their sons regarding the preservation of family land.³⁹

³⁹ *Gender and Land Rights: Contemporary Contestations in Law, Policy and Practice in Uganda*. Bikaako W. and Ssenkumba J. Wanyeki, L. M. (ed), Women and Land in Africa: Culture, Religion and Realising Women's Rights. Zed Books 2003

I am the owner of this farm

We arrive unannounced on farm Kleinfontein, stopping in front of an old, well kept German style farm house, built from solid natural stone and surrounded by huge trees. However, no German farmer steps out of the house to welcome us. Instead, an elderly Nama woman approaches us, shyly shakes our hands and invites us to sit down on her shady veranda. Several grandchildren curiously follow us and squat against the bright yellow wall.

"Yes, I am the owner of this farm," says Rachel Cinana proudly, after we tell her that we are interviewing farmers in remote areas, who cannot usually be reached by telephone. And yes, Kleinfontein formerly belonged to a Namibian-German family. After independence it was bought by the Namibian government in the course of land reform and divided into four portions for resettlement. After applying for a piece of land in 1999 Cinana was lucky to receive the part that included this beautiful homestead.

She thus became one of the more than 1,500 beneficiaries who have been resettled with their families since independence on farms bought by government from white commercial farmers. The aim was to provide formerly disadvantaged Namibians with the opportunity to become successful farmers on an own piece of land. Almost 30% of these new farmers are women, most of them single.

Rachel Cinana manages the farm together with her husband; at our arrival he is still out in the veld, herding their small flock of 130 goats. Life is not easy indeed: they have lost animals due to the drought, their water installations are damaged and they experience a complete lack of government services. "The government said they would support us with maintenance and repairs," she says, "but nobody is coming."

However, during the past seven years Cinana was able to slowly increase the number of her goats and to plant water melons, sweet potatoes and beetroot for her family and for sale in Maltahöhe. But what is even more important to her is that on this piece of land, small and dry as it is, she is able to take control of her life. Before resettlement she had worked on a commercial farm. "I was glad I had that job," she says, "but I was not able to plan my life. I was dependent, and I was never sure what would happen to me and my children once I would be too old to work."

"We are still poor," Rachel Cinana continues, "but we have a beautiful house and we take good care of the land that was entrusted to us. We can send our grandchildren to school and we can feed ourselves. And I am looking forward to December, when the whole family will come from near and far to celebrate Christmas together with us at this place which is our own."

Flowers at Halifax

Halifax was also formerly owned by a white farmer. Maria Witbooi applied for resettlement in 1996 and not much later received a piece of land. She settled on a cattle post and had to build her own house. She has always been an enthusiastic farmer. "I know what goats and sheep need, and I know how to treat them," she explains. Before, she had lived on communal land further south, owning about 50 goats. But there it was difficult and frustrating to live out her passion for farming. "There were no camps, and I had to run after my sheep all the time," she remembers. "When I got older I could not do that anymore. I decided to apply for resettlement so that I could have small camps and better control over my animals." She also disliked the crowded conditions in the communal area. "We were sitting on top of each other, and this created many problems. People were fighting."

Today Maria Witbooi has her own place and her herd of 50 goats has increased to 145 animals living in four different camps. Her children and grandchildren help her with the more strenuous tasks, and there is enough space for them to stay with her. Just as with Rachel Cinana, owning her own farm did not provide Maria Witbooi with a life without challenges. She is forced to sell some young animals because of the drought. "A good farmer sells animals while they are still strong," she explains "I am very content here," she says at the end of the interview. "Here I feel free, I am independent, and most of my problems have been solved." Does she have any wishes for the future, I ask and our guide translates my question into Nama. The old woman seems to be embarrassed about this strange question after what she has just told us. She slowly shakes her head and smiles. "No, no more wishes."

Erika von Wietersheim, *Sister Namibia* Vol 19 # 5 & 6, 1 December 2007 <http://www.africafiles.org/>



Politics, ideologies and vested interests

International commitments on women's rights to land and property

International commitments on women's rights to land, livelihood, food and health are made directly or indirectly in the following international declarations (among others):

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976)
- UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment (2001)
- Millennium Declaration (2000)
- FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food (2004)

Governments have made numerous international commitments to promote and defend women's rights as well as recognising the importance of women's rights in combating HIV and AIDS. However, these commitments are far from reflected in the ways in which resources are allocated and programmes are prioritised.

Women and girls are put at risk by economic vulnerability resulting from discrimination and lack of legal protections; by sexual violence, including in institutions such as schools, prisons and workplaces; by domestic violence including marital rape; by violations of property and inheritance rights; and in some countries by harmful traditional practices such as exorbitant bride price, widow inheritance and even ritual sexual 'cleansing'. Despite their obligations to stop such violations and abusive practices, governments too often tolerate them.

Many HIV and AIDS programmes and policies are firmly rooted in the human rights framework. This includes civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights. It is mainly politics, ideologies and the interests of local, national and international institutions that still stand in the way of achieving those rights. It has long been understood that HIV and AIDS requires a paradigm shift in development efforts, public policy, resource allocation and legal frameworks. But the paradigm shift must first happen within the institutions responsible for making these changes happen. This is yet to occur.

Each of the papers shows how political views and actions have contributed to both the timing and form of responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemics. What's in it for me? asks every political actor. What do I gain or lose by speaking out and supporting HIV/AIDS issues? Whether it is new NGOs in Brazil that can grow because of the availability of new money from a World Bank loan or the UN agencies that promote approaches to the

*epidemics. Each makes decisions on the basis of perceived gain or advantage. Each assesses its own interests, sometimes even at the expense of more effective responses to the epidemics.*⁴⁰

Women's rights have generally taken second place to other institutional priorities. Structural adjustment and macro-economic stabilisation programmes have demanded reductions and/or the commercialisation of social services including health and education, leaving women to bear the burden of care. Agricultural liberalisation programmes, subsidy withdrawal and the closure of state marketing institutions have resulted in the collapse of smallholder livelihoods, forcing women to abandon food production for alternative livelihood strategies and, often, a hand-to-mouth existence. ActionAid International reports on the IMF's obsession with keeping inflation low which has forced governments to limit social spending critical to fund public health institutions and fight HIV and AIDS. Free-market prescriptions such as market-based land reform have increased land dispossession and alienation through illegal land grabs by individuals and corporations, and through corruption in land administration, fuelling poverty, marginalisation, violence, conflict and AIDS.

Innumerable community-based initiatives have demonstrated that it is possible to raise awareness, change attitudes and put in place effective strategies to fight AIDS. It is possible to change attitudes amongst men and women in communities about gender imbalances in the face of HIV and AIDS. These initiatives have not been scaled up because institutions refuse to abandon their own ideologies, interests and politics, whether religious, economic or patriarchal fundamentalisms. All too often, this has been possible because of the active collusion or indifference of the rest of society, including civil society. Many people or institutions benefit from the status quo, be they authoritarian regimes, international institutions or traditional and religious leaders. It is critical to the fight against HIV and AIDS that we look beyond changing

⁴⁰ Collins J. and Rau B. *Politics and HIV – An Overview*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, UNRISD, Geneva 2005

behaviours to the politics of HIV and AIDS in order to find ways to break down institutional resistance to implementing women's rights.

In order to respond effectively to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, it is necessary to challenge institutional resistance to promoting women's rights at international, national and local levels. This means being bold and courageous enough to eliminate harmful traditional and religious practices, to challenge unjust social norms, to reject the imposition of harmful economic reforms and to intervene to create equality between men and women at the household level. Governments and international institutions need to create open and inclusive policy making and dialogue spaces in which women and girls are able formulate and articulate their own proposals to deal with HIV and AIDS, while ensuring that they enjoy the support of public institutions and the financial resources to craft new solutions.







Brian Sokol/ActionAid




Recommendations

Given the urgent need to tackle the feminisation of the AIDS epidemic and growing hunger, ActionAid calls on **governments, policy makers, international agencies and donors to prioritise action and funding to ensure women's rights to land, property and livelihoods:**





Ensure land and property rights

-  Introduce and uphold laws that guarantee equal access to and control of land and other productive assets for women
-  Ensure that women's rights to property, in particular inheritance rights, are protected in law and provide adequate support to women seeking legal redress when these rights are violated
-  Implement land redistribution programmes that give adequate land and productive resources to poor women, the landless and other marginalised groups
-  Eliminate institutional discrimination in land reform practices to ensure equal access and control for women.




Invest in rural women's livelihoods

-  Enhance women farmers' productivity by ensuring equal access to agricultural inputs, technology, extension services and credit
-  Increase investment in smallholder farming and provide better economic opportunities for rural women
-  Ensure agricultural support programmes are informed by and cater to the specific livelihood needs and interests of women farmers, especially those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Increase food security and nutrition

-  Place women at centre of food security and nutrition efforts and remove barriers that women face in ensuring household food security
-  Invest in rural infrastructure and other programmes to help reduce women's workload, which limits their ability to produce more food even where they may have access to adequate land and resources
-  Implement programmes to address the disproportionate domestic burden on women including by changing the societal attitude that views domestic work as a 'woman's work'
-  Provide adequate social protection programmes and financial support to recognise and compensate women's disproportionate contributions in caring for AIDS patients, orphans and affected families.

Improve policy linkages

-  Ensure that agricultural policies and land reform efforts take into account both the context of gender inequality as well as the AIDS epidemic and propose solutions that tackle both
-  Prioritise women's access and control over land and other resources as a key measure in the global AIDS response – at policy and programmatic levels
-  Implement community-based programmes and public education to combat gender stereotypes and sexist practices that fuel gender-based violence which in turn fuels the AIDS epidemic.

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