



**LEARNING GROUP 1: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES**

CHILD, YOUTH, FAMILY AND  
 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

<i>Introduction and methods</i>	1
<i>Key findings</i>	2
<i>Key findings</i>	3
<i>Recommendations</i>	4

*“...families are unable to recover sufficiently from these stressors. .. they are unable to adequately secure the future of their children beyond immediate needs”*

**FAMILIES’ EFFORTS TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF THEIR CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTIPLE STRESSES, INCLUDING HIV AND AIDS**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In the midst of current developmental targets envisioned by the Millennium Development Goals, Africa has become vulnerable to food security crises. The resilience to famines displayed by countries such as Zimbabwe and Botswana in the early 1990s has been lost, and several countries in the region are now vulnerable to a range of shocks and stressors. The livelihoods of many agrarian rural populations in Southern Africa have become sensitive to climate changes, the economy and government policy.

The deepening chronic poverty in the region, together with a lack of service delivery and the incapacitation of family resources by HIV/AIDS have reversed the many developmental gains in the region, exposing the poor to external shocks that they would otherwise have survived.

The main goal of this paper is to explore how families plan and act to secure the future of their children in this context of increased regional vulnerability which has been exacerbated by a range of multiple stressors including HIV/AIDS. Due to these stressors, particularly HIV/AIDS, families are unable to rebound from shocks, and this is exacerbated by limited resources and services. The environment within which families operate is explored, as well as how they achieve the three broad outcomes of food security, education and property rights for their children. The role of several stakeholders, such as government, community and family members is also explored

**METHODS**

The approach adopted in this paper is to look critically at the broader contextual issues within the southern African region that enables (or disables) decision-making within families in terms of seeking long-term optimal outcomes for children. Special attention is given to two in-depth case studies from Malawi (Chikwawa) and South Africa (AmaJuba). In addition peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed material is explored. The conceptual framework covers families, planning and livelihood strategies. The paper is divided into 6 sections; 1. Introduction, methods, and conceptual framework, 2. Food and nutrition security, 3. Education, 4. Property rights, 5. Family and capital formation, and 6. Conclusions and recommendations

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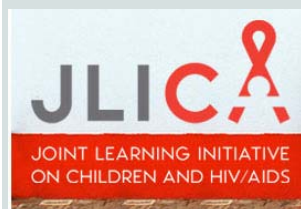
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## KEY FINDINGS

*“AIDS-related deaths have reduced the productivity of families, further affecting the amount of food farmed”*

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Current research from the Southern African region indicates that there has been a long-term erosion of livelihoods over time with resultant increases in levels of food insecurity as a major outcome of less resilient livelihood strategies. A review of regional nutritional trends by UNICEF (2003) pointed out that chronic malnutrition, as measured through levels of stunting have worsened considerably since the late 1990s. This deterioration has become rife in high HIV prevalence areas since 2000.

- **Climate change**

Data indicates that agriculture based livelihoods have been affected by rainfall failure in the SADC region since the 1980s. Meteorological data sourced from Zimbabwe indicates clearly that there is a decline in the level of rainfall received and, although not severe, drought is frequent and millions of families are not able to rebound from these climatic shocks.

- **HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS exacerbates the impact of poverty on vulnerable families. It increases disabling deprivations suffered by young children as a result of lost family livelihood and employment income when breadwinners become ill and die, and when available family resources have to be shared amongst affected kin. Thus there is a complex “bidirectional” relationship between the progression of HIV and AIDS and livelihood and food insecurity.

- **Weak state capacity**

As part of a “Triple Threat”, in addition to climate changes and HIV/AIDS shocks, many African States have been incapacitated to the extent of not being able to sustain their citizens. The shortage of skills in all sectors of the economy, public health, engineering, agriculture and education demonstrates the degree of incapacitation. This and other developments have impacted on service delivery which, in turn, has affected livelihood security especially in rural areas. In HIV/AIDS affected households children are directly affected by trade-offs and strategies families are forced to adopt in order to secure livelihoods under complex and changing conditions. Strategies such as child labour, deploying children to care for sick adults, and withdrawal from school are employed by families in their efforts to cope.

### **Links between food insecurity and HIV/AIDS**

Studies conducted in Botswana and Swaziland have linked food insufficiency with inconsistent condom use, multiple sexual partners and transactional sex. These harmful coping strategies have long term consequences for children. Similar studies in Zambia revealed that women exchanged sex for food resulting in high HIV/AIDS transmission. Extended families are obliged to care for large numbers of children orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. Families have lost productivity and income due to the unavailability of manpower and the impact of AIDS-related deaths.

### **Malawi, Chikwawa district**

The levels of poverty and food insecurity have increased dramatically in Malawi in the last 15 years as a result of severe droughts coupled with the imposition of liberal economic reforms. In the late 1980s coping strategies were in place but after 2001 millions of Malawians had to rely on food aid. Malawi has an agrarian society and livelihoods depend primarily on climatic conditions.

## KEY FINDINGS

### South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal, Amajuba district

Amajuba is located near the industrial centre of Newcastle. Livelihoods are based on employment and social grants from the government. A lack of both occasions intense stress in terms of securing livelihoods, both in the present and for children in the future. Due to the closure of mines in the area, socioeconomic conditions have worsened. Evidence of stress is manifest as limited nutritional diversity. Both climatic and financial factors were identified as contributors.

Both sites also mentioned lack of physical strength and illness of the elderly as contributing to food insecurity. These and the absence of biological parents of children worsen the vulnerabilities of children living in these areas. Food deficiencies result in illnesses and this impacts on the ability of children to attend school and the productivity of both parents and children. In both Chikwana and Amajuba, unsustainable short term coping strategies such as reducing daily food consumption and the selling of livestock were employed and these will have a long-term impact on the livelihoods of children. Similar studies conducted in Mozambique indicate that terminally ill mothers have not clearly identified plans of securing a livelihood for their children. The respondents hoped that relatives and/or the government will provide for the welfare of their children. On the other hand, in-depth studies conducted in South Africa indicate that HIV positive mothers are actively planning for their children's future.

These studies from Southern Africa reveal a deepening crisis for children due to the intersection between HIV/AIDS, poverty and climatic factors. In cases where the government offers some, even if minimal, support (as in South Africa) coupled with long-term planning by parents, the situation is not as dire as in those countries where parents lack resources to plan and service delivery from government is hampered by poverty. The major differences between the Amajuba and Chikwawa case studies is that in Amajuba education is seen as a safety-net that will provide a future livelihood whereas, in Chikwana, children are employed in unsustainable livelihood activities such as farming and early marriage for the immediate benefit of the family. The study identified weaker social ties in South Africa compared to Malawi. For example in Malawi anxiety levels about children's futures was low, because traditionally children are absorbed by relatives and continue to live and farm in the agrarian system. In South Africa dependency on social grants (and not on the traditional system of social cohesion) raises parental anxiety levels about children's futures. The death of a pensioner will entail loss of income for the family and adverse consequences for children. These differences stem from the fact that the South African economy is industrialized and the Malawian economy is largely based on subsistence farming. As evidenced in Lesotho as well, children's labour is required to sustain pressured households. In case of death from HIV/AIDS, children may lose property rights when the property owned by the deceased are taken over by relatives. Evidence from Mozambique indicates that orphaned children may lose their property rights and be abandoned by relatives to fend for themselves.

Research indicates that HIV/AIDS has left a large number of orphans, reduced the productivity of families and thus impacted on their livelihoods. The 2001 South African Population Census indicated that the poverty ratio was 56.8%, unemployment stood at 55%, there were low levels of education, and only 7% of the population attended tertiary institutions. HIV prevalence among women attending antenatal clinics was 40% in 2001 and 36.5% in 2005.

*“When children’s property rights are secure, they have more overall control of their bodies, particularly girls...”*

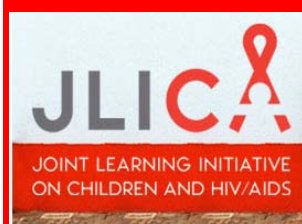
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JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE  
ON CHILDREN AND HIV/AIDS

*“...addressing the burden on children and ensuring their access to education is a potential point of intervention for future activity”*

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Family coping under the extreme conditions created by the intersection of HIV/AIDS with poverty and climatic factors requires a pre-formulated plan or strategy.

### 1. Policy

- There is a need for decisive, well-informed and holistic interventions that aim to break the negative cycles in which families may find themselves entangled.
- It is important to include parents or primary care givers in future policy and planning on issues related to children in countries most affected by AIDS.
- Outside support is required through services and safety-nets in order for families to cope. This will help to secure children's futures particularly for education, food security and securing property and inheritance rights.
- Income transfers will enable families to deal with immediate pressing needs. Early intervention through investments by families and the governments that support them will defer a downward spiral of poverty.
- Care givers must be supported, psychologically and economically, through community awareness programmes. This will help in securing the property and inheritance rights of children and ensure that families have sufficient means to support children.
- Attaining the above requires the blending of customary norms and statutory laws, which will facilitate strategies that combat the loss of rights by women and children.
- Women and children must be educated about their legal and constitutional rights, so that they can access legal protection when customary norms fail them.

### 2. Research

- There is a need for more qualitative and context-specific research that challenges stereotypes and contributes to better unravelling the motivations behind family decision making. This type of research requires an interdisciplinary approach.
- There is also a need for a longer term approach with regard to research on the impact of parental death or absence on child welfare, in the context of HIV/AIDS and/or other determinants.
- There is a need to define and understand the notion of parenting in the African context
- We also need to determine what consequences different types of care giving arrangements and household characteristics have for the economic and psychosocial well being of both caregivers and the children in their care.
- More research has to be carried out on children's property rights and livelihoods in the context of HIV and AIDS