

## Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in agriculture and rural livelihoods

*The past twenty years or so have seen concerted efforts towards mainstreaming HIV and AIDS into the development agenda. From an agricultural perspective, the sector offers unique opportunities both to prevent the spread of HIV and mitigate the impacts of AIDS. Thus agencies with agriculturally-focused mandates have been progressively more active in bringing HIV and AIDS issues into the core business of the sector. Yet despite the achievements made, the process is not without challenges.*

According to UNAIDS mainstreaming is “a process that enables development actors to address the causes and effects of AIDS in an effective and sustained manner, both through their usual work and within their workplace”. Since the advent of the epidemic, much work has been done in trying to mainstream HIV and AIDS into policies and programmes of NGOs, UN agencies and governments, particularly in countries hard hit by the epidemic. Thanks to these efforts, a multitude of programmes have been put in place (examples: see Boxes 1 and 2).

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### Challenges

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HIV/AIDS is a multi-sectoral issue – thus, to address it adequately, a multi-sectoral approach is needed; but it was never going to be easy trying to bring what is still widely seen as a medical issue into mainstream development policy and programmes. To date, one cannot say that the goal of mainstreaming has been fully achieved. Through our field experiences and interactions with governments, NGOs and other development actors, we have learned that the following challenges remain:

One of the most pressing challenges is a lack of capacity to implement activities geared to mainstreaming HIV and AIDS, particularly in many developing countries where resources are scarce. Staff lack skills and experience with which to mainstream HIV and AIDS considerations into their day to day work. The so-called ‘brain drain’ from developing to developed countries speaks to the difficulties that some countries face in retaining highly-qualified individuals. This problem is often compounded by a lack of

policy guidance and political support on the part of senior management and political leaders. Thus, the outcome is often activities that are “ad hoc, poorly timed, product- rather than process-focused, fragmented and ill-targeted” (Verbruggen, UNAIDS, 2006).

The second challenge pertains to perceptions of HIV and AIDS. By nature, HIV and AIDS encompass inherently intimate and personal issues, centring as it does on sexual relationships and networks. Yet the linkages between such personal issues and the day to day work of agricultural extension staff may not always be clear.

Finally, despite the changing attitudes over the years, AIDS is still largely seen as a health problem. It is often not perceived as a priority area for the agriculture sector and thus the mainstreaming effort fails to attract the necessary resources – human and financial – for its successful implementation. Initiatives are often one-off events, perceived as a goal in itself as opposed to a means to an end.

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### Needs

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The epidemic is not going to disappear in the foreseeable future – declining life expectancies are grim proof. Therefore the need to mainstream remains critical as ever. In a joint UN agency workshop on mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in the agricultural sector held in November 2007, the following needs were highlighted: There



Photo: Global Aware

*AIDS is still not perceived as a priority topic in the agricultural sector.*

## Box 1: GTZ's mainstreaming approach: A two pillar approach

### 1<sup>st</sup> Pillar – Internal mainstreaming

HIV Workplace Programme – A comprehensive programme addressing issues of ignorance about HIV, stigma and discrimination, and access to services and supplies in all countries where local and external GTZ-staff are operating.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Pillar – External mainstreaming

Projects and programmes in partnership with national, provincial, district and local governments and committed to building capacity to respond to AIDS:

- Advocacy, awareness raising and prevention for partners and target groups
- Support to workplace programmes for partner ministries
- Adjustment of regular objectives and measures to meet specific needs of HIV-affected households
- Support for integration of AIDS-aspects into routine planning and decision-making cycles

(www.gtz.de)

## Box 2: What is FAO doing?

FAO has been providing technical assistance to member countries on issues related to HIV and AIDS and agriculture.

One of the key areas for support identified by member countries has been in the formulation of HIV-responsive policies and strategies. Some other examples of FAO's work include:

- Capacity and institutional building to enhance local level capacity to mainstream HIV and AIDS
- Generation of knowledge to show the linkages between HIV/AIDS and agriculture
- Use of evidence to create awareness and support policy dialogue and advocacy with governing bodies

(www.fao.org)

is a clear need for continued advocacy with governments, policy makers, and heads of organisations. The exposure of key stakeholders to new thinking, emerging concepts and approaches for mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in the agricultural sector is instrumental and can help to speed up the pace in bringing HIV and AIDS issues to the food security agenda at national and local levels. However, such initiatives should be accompanied by capacity development. Country-wide processes and coordination among actors are overdue. Finally, there is a wealth of toolkits and other resources but they are of limited use if not accompanied by the necessary facilitation process.

### Silver lining?

Newly released epidemiological data on HIV and AIDS show that the epidemic started to stabilize some nine years ago. In some countries, the

epidemic is actually declining. Certainly it remains to be seen whether such lull will last. UNAIDS ascribes the stabilisation and decline of the epidemic to the many initiatives that have been put in place. This is a good reason for seeking to strengthen the efforts to mainstream HIV and AIDS into the agriculture sector.

In particular capacity development must be approached in a coordinated manner to avoid overlap and confusion, through the establishment of country-wide processes and coordination between different actors and different levels. Here UNAIDS' Three Ones-Principle – one national HIV and AIDS framework, one national coordinating authority and one monitoring and evaluation system – remains an often unexploited opportunity at country-level. Initiatives must address various aspects of capacity and focus on the training needs of recipients, including enhanced skills for

## Zusammenfassung

Programme zur Etablierung und Integration von HIV- und AIDS-Bekämpfung sehen sich mehreren Problemen gegenüber; die drei wichtigsten Hindernisse für die entsprechende Qualifizierung und Institutionenstärkung sind fehlendes Fachwissen und Erfahrung mit solchen Programmen, die persönlichen und privaten Aspekte der HIV/AIDS-bezogenen Arbeit und die Tatsache, dass AIDS immer noch häufig als reines Gesundheitsproblem gesehen wird. Neue Denkansätze bei den wichtigen Akteuren und neue Konzepte für HIV- und AIDS-Programme in der Landwirtschaft können neue Maßstäbe setzen, wenn sie durch koordinierte Qualifizierungsmaßnahmen flankiert werden und können die Einbindung von HIV/AIDS in Programme zur Ernährungssicherung beschleunigen.

## Resumen

La integración transversal de la temática del VIH/SIDA implica afrontar diversos desafíos. En el caso del desarrollo de capacidades, los tres principales son: falta de destrezas y experiencias relacionadas con la integración transversal; temas íntimos y personales inherentes al trabajo con el VIH/SIDA; el hecho de que el SIDA es aún a menudo considerado sólo un tema de salud. Resulta beneficioso el contacto de las partes interesadas más destacadas con este nuevo punto de vista y los conceptos recientes para la integración del VIH y el SIDA en el sector agrícola, siempre y cuando se emplee un enfoque de desarrollo coordinado de capacidades. De ser así, puede incluso ayudar a acelerar el avance en la integración de los temas del VIH y del SIDA en la agenda de la seguridad alimentaria.

accessing funds (e.g. planning and proposal writing), exposure to mainstreaming tools and their application, monitoring and evaluation, partnerships and networks, and – most important – community capacity enhancement.

Finally, mainstreaming is ultimately a people-driven process. Supporting capacitated human resources working in rural areas is the most promising approach for further success – let's go for it jointly!