



HIV/AIDS, Land-based Livelihoods, and Land Reform in South Africa

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In 1994, South Africa's Department of Land Affairs initiated a land reform programme. Land reform was—and still is—intended to redress the racial imbalance in landholding, develop the agricultural sector, and improve the livelihoods of the poor. However, there is now a growing concern that the pro-poor objectives of land reform may be under threat from the AIDS epidemic. Thus far there has been little tangible action aimed at either better understanding the relationship between land reform and the AIDS epidemic, or in respect of adjusting land reform policies and practice in reaction to the epidemic.

The ultimate aim of the research was to generate actionable policy recommendations and programme responses, first of all by answering basic questions such as to what extent and in what way the AIDS epidemic poses a threat to South Africa's land reform programme, and secondly by identifying specific ways in which land reform policy and practice should be adjusted. The study was not solely about the impact of HIV and AIDS on land reform and rural livelihoods, but equally about whether and how land reform can serve as an intervention to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS on affected households.

HIV/AIDS as a threat to land reform

There was a common perception among beneficiary respondents that land reform projects were at risk from HIV and AIDS in the same manner that a private company might be, i.e. because of the impact on the labor force as well as its 'management' or leadership.

However, this general observation can be refined by taking into account that the demographic profiles of land reform projects vary considerably, but also that land reform projects are structured in diverse ways. For example with some involving 'corporate-style' production, and others more individualised land allocation and land use. According to project members' own perceptions, age and project type were two inter-related factors that have much to do with the vulnerability of land reform projects to HIV and AIDS.

There is some evidence, albeit tentative, that beneficiaries of projects that rely on collective action were especially mindful of the danger posed to their projects if members and particularly leaders die. By contrast, beneficiaries of projects that were more individualistic were more apt to focus on the future uncertainty associated with the susceptibility of the youth to AIDS, as mentioned above.

Land reform, household-level food security and HIV/AIDS

The issue of household-level food security was explored by means of a question about the number of meals eaten by the household in the previous day, and a question as to what the household's main meal in the previous day consisted of.

There was compelling evidence that on redistribution and restitution projects, AIDS-affected households were less food secure than non-affected households. This is in contrast to the absence of any such evident relationship on the communal sites. This absence does not constitute evidence of an absence, though the contrast was nonetheless conspicuous. While it is not surprising that AIDS negatively impacts the food security of affected households, why would this be more evident on land reform projects than in communal areas?

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The answer relates to the composition of the previous day's main meal, wherein the relationship to AIDS-affectedness is very nearly the opposite, i.e. affected households are *less* likely to have had a main meal the previous day comprising two or fewer foods. The results for the communal sites are indeterminate, but if anything appear to swing the other way. The implication is that land reform contributes positively to the dietary diversity of affected households. This is reinforced when one looks at the sources of the different components of the previous day's main meal, wherein affected households are more likely to have sourced one or more ingredients from the land acquired via land reform. It became clear that affected households were especially likely to derive some of their diet from the project land, as though consciously mindful of the need to secure a diverse and healthy diet.

The implications of HIV/AIDS for land rights

Overall, the findings as to the impact of HIV and AIDS on land rights are muted. It would appear that tenure insecurity is less of a problem on land reform projects than it is in communal areas, but that there is reason to believe that some types of land reform projects are more likely to experience tenure problems than others. In particular, it is predicted that those land reform projects that involve individual (household) allocations on group-owned land are more likely to experience such problems

particularly to the extent the formal mechanisms of their legal entities are submerged in favour of land administration systems transplanted from communal areas. This is not to suggest that for projects involving group-owned land, individual allocations should be discouraged, only that in these situations government should be especially vigilant, and make particular efforts to strengthen the legal entities.

Policy implications

Arguably the main policy implication of the research was that HIV/AIDS as a threat to land reform was less significant than land reform as a means of mitigating the household-level (and perhaps community-level) impact of AIDS. This was not to suggest that the potential threat of HIV/AIDS to land reform can be ignored; however, given that it was not clear what that threat looks like or how great it is, with some exceptions it is difficult to identify necessary policy adjustments. On the other hand, given the relatively robust finding that land reform contributes positively to affected households' ability to cope, there is much that can be done to enhance this. Most notably, the predominant reason households demand land, and by extension would wish to benefit from land reform, is to enhance their food security, more could be done to support the food security potential of land reform projects, and not necessarily at the expense of other land reform objectives.

About RENEWAL

RENEWAL is a growing regional "network-of-networks" in Sub-Saharan Africa. Currently active in five 'hub' countries (Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, South Africa, and Kenya), RENEWAL comprises national networks of food and nutrition-relevant organizations (public, private, and nongovernmental) together with partners in AIDS and public health. RENEWAL aims to enhance understanding of the worsening interactions between HIV/AIDS and food and nutrition security, and facilitate a comprehensive response to these interactions. Core objectives are (1) to reduce critical gaps in understanding how livelihoods, particularly those deriving from agriculture, (a) contribute to the further spread of HIV (susceptibility), and (b) are affected by HIV and AIDS (vulnerability); (2) to generate new policy-relevant knowledge on how households and communities may strengthen both their resistance to HIV transmission and their resilience to the impacts of AIDS, and (3) to enable relevant institutions (in particular, governments) to generate and to act upon realistic priorities for responding to the interactions of AIDS epidemics with food and nutrition insecurity.

RENEWAL is both a network and a process, with the process of network development being viewed as both a means and an end. The aim is to enhance and sustain impact through pro-actively establishing links between locally-prioritized research, capacity strengthening and policy communications.

RENEWAL is fortunate to be supported at present by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Rockefeller Foundation, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and USAID Food for Peace.

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Note: This brief is based on a RENEWAL working paper containing preliminary material and research results. These papers have not been subject to formal external reviews managed by IFPRI's Publications Review Committee, but have been reviewed by at least one internal or external researcher. They are circulated in order to stimulate discussion and critical comment.

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