



Case Study Four

Provision of Agricultural Implements (Ox-drawn Ploughs), Nyanga, Zimbabwe

Who

FACT Nyanga, an HIV and AIDS Service Organisation partnered by ActionAid, working with twelve communities in Nyanga, focusing on vulnerable households and individuals infected and/or affected by HIV and AIDS, and by the ongoing food crisis in Zimbabwe.

Why

In the context of increasing food insecurity, the project was intended to:

- Facilitate the recovery of agricultural food production for HIV- and AIDS-infected and affected individuals and households in disadvantaged and marginalised communities;
- Stimulate and strengthen community coping strategies and responses to the socio-economic consequences of the HIV and AIDS pandemic through the provision of direct material needs (food, seed and agricultural tools) for identified community members;
- Strengthen the capacity of communities to respond effectively to the pandemic and to curb further transmission of HIV.

Farm households tend to utilise remittance and off-farm income as a primary means of affording expensive assets such as oxen, ploughs, and fertiliser, which are used to capitalise farm production (Reardon, Crawford & Kelly,

1995; Marenja *et al.*, 2003). These sources of income are often jeopardised in AIDS-afflicted households, particularly those that are already asset-poor and vulnerable (Mushati *et al.*, 2003; FASAZ, 2003; Yamano & Jayne, 2004; Donovan *et al.*, 2003). Cash constraints on farm intensification are worse during illness and after a death, when medical and funeral expenses rise and caregiving by other members reduces their income-earning potential as well.

What

The project focuses explicitly on the provision of seed and agricultural tools, in particular hoes and ox-drawn ploughs, and also fertiliser, to HIV- and AIDS-infected and affected families and individuals. FACT realised that affected communities were unable to utilise their land resources properly due to the impoverishing impact of HIV and AIDS. The provision of ploughs and other agricultural implements has allowed communities to utilise their land in order to better cope with food insecurity, particularly orphans and child-headed households through the support structures within the communities.

The plough allocated to each community is kept in a central place, usually the homestead of a member of the voluntary community support group that provides home-based care to chronically ill community members. One community benefiting from the intervention consisted of 331 households with 254 orphans (defined as having lost either one or both parents).

The plough is utilised by beneficiaries who are identified and selected through community structures, which prioritise orphan or child-headed households. These

households are lent cattle by other community members to provide draught power and are shown how to till the land by community members, simultaneously imparting necessary “life skills” to these households and thereby reducing dependency and encouraging independence. Less affected community members may also submit requests to the committee to utilise the plough. Decisions are made according to a roster that ensures equitable use of the community asset. The plough is maintained through contributions made by the community into a central fund, and additional money is raised through hiring out the implement to farmers and through the sale of surplus produce.

Seeds and other inputs have been provided by FACT and ActionAid to communities that have little access to seeds in time of economic stress, and are provided in two phases through the year: beans, groundnuts and maize in the summer, and community vegetable gardens in the winter. The provision of vegetable seeds, in particular onions and tomatoes, supplements the nutritional intake of vulnerable and HIV and AIDS-affected households. The vegetables are supplied through the home-based care system already in existence in the village. Other agricultural inputs such as hand-held hoes are provided and allow more regular maintenance of fields and gardens, which orphans assist with under the guidance of community members. The provision of inorganic fertiliser enabled the community to harvest significant yields in the previous season.

The surplus of these harvests is sold to raise cash to purchase non-food items such as salt, soap and school exercise books – and, indeed, to ensure the maintenance of the plough. The collection and storage of excess seeds

is an important factor in ensuring a harvest in the following season, especially in the current situation where seeds are expensive and communities have less money than in “normal” years outside of drought and the economic challenges facing Zimbabwe.

With whom

FACT is Zimbabwe’s oldest AIDS Service Organisation founded in 1987, providing HIV prevention programmes, training and care. A Christian-based organisation, it promotes sexual abstinence outside marriage and faithfulness within marriage, and approaches the HIV and AIDS pandemic through community-based and development-orientated programmes, helping communities to establish their own AIDS-related activities through the provision of training, materials and technical support. Their conceptual approach is that under-development is the major underlying cause of the pandemic, which is addressed through emphasising women’s programmes and income generation projects.

How

ActionAid provides seed and agricultural tools to FACT Nyanga on request, which are distributed to families and individuals infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

The FACT Nyanga project is a component of the Emergency Response Programme, itself part of the larger Strategies for Action Programme (SFA). The SFA, which supports community responses to HIV and AIDS and builds the institutional capacity of local AIDS service organisations, is being undertaken in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Uganda, focusing on the provision of grant financing

for community-level activities. The Emergency Response Programme identified eight local AIDS service organisations in Zimbabwe and established partnerships with these using a grant from the Disaster Emergency Committee. Seed and agricultural tools have been distributed to communities through the eight organisations.

The local organisation identifies the direct beneficiaries through its own structures and networks of community support groups. These local organisations utilise their registers of members, which include people living positively with HIV and AIDS, grandparents taking care of grandchildren, child-headed households and orphans, to select the beneficiaries, and in most instances, orphans have been identified as the priority group.

The eight organisations were given budgets to identify and procure local inputs necessary to the specific areas of activity. Fertilisers and seeds were usually sourced locally. In Nyanga, FACT used the innovative approach of buying twelve ox-drawn ploughs, with the ploughs and draught power being shared among clusters of people, either groups of households or a single village, with management structures set up to oversee the group arrangement. The use of the ploughs was controlled through a roster. People outside of the beneficiary groups could also rent the ploughs, which brought in funds to maintain the equipment.

Benefits and impact

The provision of the ploughs has revitalised community support structures and united people struggling against the increased pressures of deepening food insecurity. Thus the mitigation intervention provided by ActionAid

and FACT has facilitated the strengthening of traditional institutions for the benefit of their communities. This empowerment strategy should theoretically be sustainable when outside support ceases.

The home-based care initiative already in place in the community (through facilitation by FACT) was reinforced and supplemented by the ox-drawn plough initiative. In particular the provision of surplus produce, which was of high nutritional value, and the ability to actively support orphan and child-headed households, were important activities to support the care initiative. The provision of the plough ensured that the community was able to pull together during a time of difficulty and to ensure that members learnt from each other. It also resulted in an increased harvest that awoke the interest of other community members, and knowledge about the technology and its uses was disseminated throughout the area. The committee agreed that the plough had greatly improved the lives of the community in general.

In addition to the support provided through the intervention, the relationship with an outside NGO with links to other institutions ensured that information about human rights was imparted to the community. Information about property stripping was provided to the community in order to sensitise members about possible scenarios that might afflict their community and what options were available to address such problems.

Timeline

The Zimbabwe Emergency Response Programme commenced in 2002 with the advent of the food crisis in the country.



Gaps in evidence

It is not fully evident that seed is being stored for subsequent seasons and that ActionAid and FACT will be able to withdraw and leave a self-sufficient community. This needs to be interrogated in detail in order to ensure the sustainability of the intervention.

How is this different from standard interventions?

It attempts to build the capacity of local AIDS service organisations and complement existing projects set up by the AIDS service organisation. The intervention is also not imposed by outside “experts” but based on opinions and ideas expressed through community discussions, or, where possible, based on existing community institutions and responses.

The project explicitly focuses on building the capacity of local AIDS service organisations, and locally based extension services, whether from the government or the partner organisation. According to Harvey, the impetus for considering HIV and AIDS in the recent humanitarian response in 2002/2003 came largely from the top down, prompted by the Lewis report in September 2002 and the Lewis and Morris report in early 2003, as well as through pressure from donors and headquarters. This meant that initially HIV and AIDS as an issue remained largely at the level of rhetoric, and

the practicalities of engaging with HIV and AIDS in humanitarian programming only started being addressed in 2002/2003. An obvious exception to this was where agencies or their partners had ongoing long-term HIV and AIDS programmes and used these to build an emergency response. An excellent example of this is the ActionAid programme in Zimbabwe and the relationship with AIDS service organisations to provide seeds and tools, which takes cognisance of the history of rural restructuring and builds on this. In particular, it ensures that projects are explicitly targeted at the local economy, and that the basic objective is achieved and then builds on this, rather than attempting to achieve too much from the outset. In this way, it is a dynamic process that allows local opportunities and conditions to be built into the project.

The ActionAid intervention acknowledges the strengths, particularly the knowledge base, that exists within the communities with which it works. There are a number of simple yet effective technologies that ActionAid could be further harnessing to strengthen its overall impact, and such Indigenous Knowledge Systems should be a formal feature of all its initiatives. The intervention was effective because ActionAid involved beneficiaries in deciding what the project should do for them.

Enabling factors

Effective partnerships established with local AIDS service organisations that ensured adequate personnel and expertise were committed to the project. The fact that these organisations, in particular FACT, were well-organised and had established HIV and AIDS support

groups added to this success. The organisations had experience working with community-based organisations and support groups and had developed strong relations of trust. ActionAid technical support guaranteed that effective support was available for the project. Strong community support was secured through participatory approaches and the engagement with and respect for traditional institutions. Local authorities participated in the project and this also ensured ongoing support.

The communities were situated in a high rainfall area in the east of Zimbabwe and thus did not experience the worst of the drought. The communities were largely old A1 Communal Type resettlement projects from the 1980s and thus were relatively secure from an economic perspective. The local economy appeared to be functioning well despite having lost the good access to markets that existed previously when the transport system operated more regularly.

Constraining factors

Agricultural inputs in relation to the need/demand were inadequate and there was a delay in the distribution of inputs. The shortage of basic commodities such as food, fuel, seed and fertiliser hampered the project considerably but seemed unavoidable, being indicative of the overall situation in Zimbabwe. Limited geographic coverage restricted the overall impact of the intervention, while the limited experience of the partner organisations in emergency response also constrained the overall impact.

Another major factor that impacts on the sustainability of the project is the increasing number of sick adults

Many adults in their prime working age leave their communities to seek work in urban areas, and often return to their communities infected by HIV and AIDS, placing an excessive strain on community resources

returning to their rural communities. Many adults in their prime working age leave their communities to seek work in urban areas, and often return to their communities infected by HIV and AIDS. This unpredictable drain on community resources may place excessive strain on the support base of the ActionAid/FACT intervention.

As the benefits of the plough become more evident to a larger group of people, particularly when alternative livelihood opportunities are scarce, it is likely that increased demand will be made on it, and additional ploughs will either have to be bought by the community or donated by the two supporting NGOs. Over-usage of the plough, particularly on the hard dry surfaces common during the dry season, will also add to the maintenance necessary for the blade.

Additional ideas or potential improvements

An opportunity exists to share knowledge around the preservation and preparation of foodstuffs produced through the intervention. Committee members and caregivers raised the issue that they did not always have sufficient food to give to the HIV and AIDS-affected households they visit, particularly during the 'hungry'

The challenge for the agricultural community and specifically for the agricultural research community is to develop farming practices that adapt to the realities of middle- and late-stage HIV- and AIDS-affected environments and yet maintain productivity levels

season. Preservation techniques, particularly through sun-drying produce such as tomatoes, would ensure that a stock of nutritious food is always available for needy households. In addition, preparation techniques that conserve as many nutrients as possible would provide an important opportunity for the community.

The challenge for the agricultural community and specifically for the agricultural research community is to develop farming practices that adapt to the realities of middle- and late-stage HIV- and AIDS-affected environments and yet maintain productivity levels (Haddad & Gillespie, 2001).

Despite the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS on agricultural production and rural livelihoods, and in spite of the fact that up to 80 per cent of the people in the most affected countries depend on subsistence agriculture, most of the response to the epidemic has come from the

health sector. The agriculture sector has either remained silent or has adopted initiatives similar to the health sector to counter the effects of the epidemic. The agricultural sector is in a strong position to assist in both the prevention and mitigation of the consequences of HIV and AIDS.

A number of principles should be borne in mind when designing appropriate agricultural sector responses to HIV and AIDS (Haddad & Gillespie, 2001:34-38). There is a need for interventions to be designed and assessed not only in terms of their ability to mitigate the current impact, but also their ability to reduce susceptibility to future infection and vulnerability to the various impacts of HIV and AIDS. There is a need to recognise the limited influence of sectoral policies and interventions in mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS, particularly in situations where the pandemic cannot be monitored effectively. Another major issue is the fact that most HIV and AIDS programmes are small-scale and have been referred to as “expensive boutiques” available only to a small percentage of the affected population (Binswanger, cited in Haddad & Gillespie, 2001). For example, in Kagera, Tanzania, only two of five districts are covered by HIV and AIDS services, reaching only five per cent of the population, and the challenge is therefore to find ways of scaling up locally relevant, community-driven approaches.