



Fact Sheet on Youth Reproductive Health Policy

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS AND HIV/AIDS

Facts and Figures

- Youth ages 15–24 years old constitute nearly half of unemployed people globally (UNDESA, 2007).
- Most sex workers are young women under the age of 25 (UNAIDS, 2006).
- About two-thirds (6.2 million) of all HIV-positive youth live in sub-Saharan Africa. Seventy-five percent of HIV infections among youth are endured by girls (Hallman, 2005; Lukas, 2008; UNAIDS, 2004).

Youth reproductive health is compromised by poverty (see the “Poverty and Youth Reproductive Health” Fact Sheet), which also results in vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted infection (STIs). Studies have found that girls living in poor households are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as transactional sex, nonconsensual sex, and having sex with multiple partners, compared with those who are better off (Bruce, 2006b; Hallman et al., 2007; UNAIDS, 2004). Poverty and social isolation may increase girls’ risk of sexual coercion, which increases their risk of pregnancy and HIV infection. A study in South Africa found that males and females ages 15–24 years old from poor families are less likely to discuss safe sex options and use preventative measures when engaging in sexual activities, compared with their better-off peers (Hallman et al., 2007). To alleviate poverty and reduce the transmission of HIV, attention is being focused on how sustainable livelihood and microfinance initiatives can help youth lead empowered and productive lives that result in improved health outcomes.¹

“Livelihood is defined as a means of living, and the capabilities, assets, and activities required for it. A livelihood encompasses income, as well as social institutions, gender relations, and property rights required to support and sustain a certain standard of living. It also includes access to and benefits derived from social and public services provided by the state, such as education, health services, and other infrastructure” (Masanjala, 2006, p. 1033). Sustainable livelihood programs seek to create long-lasting solutions to poverty by empowering their target population and addressing their overall well-being. The programs are varied in their focus, approach, and target audience, although many of them

- Provide youth with salaried jobs and other opportunities to earn income;
- Provide financial services and related on-the-job training;
- Develop institutions, alliances, and networks for youth to advance their economic interests; and
- Promote policy and social changes that improve young people’s livelihood prospects (Rosen, 2001).

Microfinance programs can help the poor manage their financial affairs and access financial services that are otherwise unavailable in the regular commercial sector (Clark, 1999). Traditional microfinance programs can help youth address some of the risk factors for HIV vulnerability if donors and microfinance institutions find a way to provide creative financial incentives to older adolescents that improve their economic status and prospects. Although these approaches may not be ideal for younger adolescents, sustainable livelihood programs geared toward adolescent girls (ages 10–19 years old) may be the key to integrating HIV prevention strategies. These programs could be strategically placed to address various risk factors for HIV infections faced by adolescent girls, including social isolation, child marriage, low socioeconomic status, lack of education, and pressure to provide productive labor and income (Lukas, 2008).

¹ The Brundtland Commission on the Environment and Development first introduced the sustainable livelihoods approach, which was adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 as an innovative tool for poverty alleviation (Krantz, 2001).

IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS IN IMPROVING YOUTH REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

- Youth livelihood programs can improve their reproductive health by preventing child labor, reducing the spread of HIV and other STIs, supporting reproductive health programs, and reducing harmful social behavior, such as gang membership (Rosen, 2001).
- Most livelihood programs are small-scale, community-based interventions. These demand-driven, bottom-up initiatives vary greatly, because they reflect the needs of their target population, rather than donor interest (Ogden, 2004).
- It is important for HIV-positive youth and youth caretakers of family members with HIV and/or AIDS to earn an income, because they are often unable to find employment (Rosen et al., 2001).
- Livelihood strategies can help prevent HIV and mitigate its impact on children and youth. HIV programs must continue to focus on the immediate needs of youth for reproductive health information and services, while incorporating a livelihoods perspective into their activities.

KEY AREAS FOR POLICY ACTION

Policies that support sustainable livelihood strategies seek to do the following:

- **Reduce Poverty and Allocate Social Benefits to Help People Living with HIV.** Policies that focus on helping those living with and affected by HIV will ensure greater support of and funding for sustainable livelihood approaches.
- **Improve Girls' Schooling, Job Opportunities, and Ability to Access Credit in Order to Reduce their Vulnerability to Sexual Exploitation.** Increasing livelihood options for girls reduces their chance of falling into high-risk behavior that could lead to HIV infection (Bruce and Joyce, 2006).
- **Create and Formulate National Policies to Protect and Support Vulnerable Youth, such as Street Children, Refugees, and Orphans.** Street children and refugees are at a greater risk of contracting HIV because of poverty and unstable living conditions. Orphans are much more likely to engage in economically motivated sexual encounters than non-orphans (Hallman, 2004).
- **Implement National Legislation to Protect the Property Rights of AIDS Orphans and Address the Needs of Youth Affected by or Infected with HIV.** The issue of inheritance rights may require governments to ensure that each child has a birth certificate and national identification (which many children in developing countries do not have) to strengthen coordination and administration of government child service and social service departments that offer safety nets to children. National legislation is needed to establish and/or enforce inheritance rights of child- and widow-headed households. Such laws could help to curb the escalating number of street children and minimize the practice among young girls and women of trading sex for security and shelter, thus contributing to HIV prevention (Strobbe, 2005).

THE STATE OF POLICYMAKING

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women set the foundation for policymaking focused on children and youth, spurring the development of several other policies that further define and provide for the needs of children and youth. However, more work needs to be done in the policy and legal arena, because no single piece of legislation has been enacted to facilitate and fund the implementation of sustainable livelihood approaches.

The most effective policies to support sustainable livelihood programs are those that focus on schooling. Schooling is a key element in preventing poverty and improving health outcomes (Bruce and Chong, 2006a). Policies that focus on strengthening school systems and increasing attendance and continuation, especially for older youth, have positive effects on youth reproductive health (Lloyd, 2005).

Policies that ban early marriage and discourage intergenerational sex also support sustainable livelihood programs (Luke and Kurtz, 2002). These policies can reduce the prevalence of HIV and validate the efforts of livelihood programs. Policies that

seek to improve gender norms are also instrumental, because they support the attempts of sustainable livelihood programs to instill more equitable gender norms among youth at an early age (Hallman, 2005). In addition, sustainable livelihoods programs are also supported by policies that promote poverty alleviation (see the fact sheet “Poverty and Youth Reproductive Health”).

To search for more policies related to sustainable livelihoods, see the [Youth-Policy Database](#).

GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FOR PROGRAMS²

- To what extent is rural youth a significant “social category” with specific social and economic needs that should be addressed through targeted interventions?
- Should development project preparation include a youth analysis along the same lines as the methodology for gender analysis?
- Should governments do more to support specific pro-poor youth policies? What would these policies entail?
- What are the comparative advantages and disadvantages of programs working with youth?

ILLUSTRATIVE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAM EXAMPLES

The examples described below are just a few of the sustainable livelihood programs that seek to improve youth reproductive health globally. They are excerpted from a review of sustainable livelihood programs conducted by the Futures Group in 2008 (see [Lukas \(2008\)](#) for the full document).

- The **Cama Seed Money Scheme** is implemented in **Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Ghana**. It gives small grants to out-of-school women to help them start businesses and participate in training to build their capacity as business leaders. Through this scheme, young women in rural areas have become economically independent and gained a means of livelihood. Communities in which the Campaign for Female Education International (Camfed) works have experienced positive changes away from gender-inequitable norms and traditions.
- **FINCA Uganda**, an affiliate of **FINCA International**, has partnered with local hospitals and institutions to provide healthcare services and insurance to clients affected by HIV. Clients have been able to generate income and create savings accounts. Seventy percent of clients’ children attend school, and people affected by HIV are able to build support networks.
- **The Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE) Project** in **South Africa** created a 12-15 month training curriculum on microfinance. It also provides a program called Sisters for Life that promotes gender equity in microfinance. Outcomes of the project include greater women’s empowerment (according to nine indicators created by IMAGE), a 50 percent reduction in physical and sexual violence, and increased awareness in intimate partner violence.

RESEARCH FINDINGS TO SUPPORT POLICY DEVELOPMENT

[*The Diverse Universe of Adolescents, and the Girls and Boys Left Behind: A Note on Research, Program and Policy Priorities*](#). Bruce and Chong (2006b). This 2006 UN Millennium Project paper reviews existing policies on adolescent reproductive health and the scope for innovative strategies, such as sustainable livelihood approaches to reduce the incidence of HIV.

[*Microfinance Brief: Tap and Reposition Youth \(TRY\): Providing Social Support, Savings, and Microcredit Opportunities for Young Women in Areas with High HIV Prevalence*](#). New York: Population Council. Hall et al. (2006). This report describes a successful sustainable livelihood program in Kenya. It discusses the success and failures of the program.

² These questions have been adapted from Bennell (2007).

[Youth Skills Enterprise Initiative: A Zambian Case Study of Micro-Enterprise and Microcredit Support for Street-Based Youth](#). SKI (2002). This case study presents lessons learned from a microfinance program in Zambia.

[Change, Choice and Power: Young Women, Livelihoods, and HIV Prevention](#). Urdang (2007). This report examines the role of microfinance as the only potential source of income for impoverished young women and adolescent girls. It includes several microfinance interventions to improve sexual and reproductive health and empower young women.

FAQs

Q. What is the difference between sustainable livelihood approaches and microfinance programs?

The sustainable livelihood approach shares with microfinance a focus on eradicating poverty, a “bottom-up” foundation in communities, a client base to which it is responsive, and a link to private markets. The sustainable livelihood approach acknowledges that family and work demands dominate much of adolescents’ lives and work is often a means of fulfilling family obligations. Because formal education is acknowledged as important, but is not always possible, opportunities to develop workplace skills through informal means are also sought (Population Council and ICRW, 2000).

The primary focus of microfinance programs is on credit, whereas a sustainable livelihood approach employs a broader strategy to find safe, productive employment for youth by building their capabilities and providing resources and opportunities to enable them to define and pursue their goals. Capabilities include skills, self-confidence, and good health; resources can be financial (e.g., microfinance or savings), physical (e.g., housing), or social (e.g., networks). Opportunities include self-employment, wage employment, and home-based work (Population Council, 2005; Population Council and ICRW, 2000). Advocates of this approach consider the synergy among building capabilities, resources, and opportunities to be important, but not every program response needs to include all three domains (Population Council and ICRW, 2000).

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For More Information

Health Policy Initiative, Task Order I
Futures Group
One Thomas Circle, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005 USA
Tel: (202) 775-9680
Fax: (202) 775-9694

policyinfo@futuresgroup.com
<http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com>
<http://ghiqc.usaid.gov>

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