

SOUTHERN AFRICA RESILIENCE CHALLENGE

Resilience of HIV/AIDS burdened communities to loss in livelihood and food insecurity

[Source: Community consultations in 4 communities in Southern Africa; Southern Africa Resilience Innovation Lab-ResilientAfrica Network]

HIV/AIDS has been a major source of stress to communities in Southern Africa with South Africa having the highest prevalence in the world (prevalence among adults 16-49 is 16.6 per cent), Zimbabwe has more than 14% of adults age 15-49 infected with HIV and the national adult HIV prevalence in Malawi is 11%. HIV/AIDS is responsible for reversing decades of economic and social development and causing rural disintegration. AIDS-related deaths of the most economically valuable members of communities – young adults – contribute to economic and social disruptions that can affect agricultural activities, land use, and land tenure. Vulnerable communities, where people are unable to buffer themselves from hazards for a number of reasons, have a low ability to cope with HIV/AIDS and intermittent shocks such as drought and flooding.

Understanding the adaptive capacity or resilience of those affected by these shocks and HIV/AIDS is important to informing the design of effective interventions that could promote their wellbeing. A detailed analysis of data generated from community consultations (Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews) in South Africa (Ga-Dikgale and Pyramid communities), Malawi (Chikwawa) and Zimbabwe (Beitbridge) demonstrates the factors that make households resilient to these common stresses and how the effects of HIV and AIDS impact on the community resilience dimensions.

The main dimensions from the data collected in Zimbabwe include environmental factors, unemployment, human capital, governance factors, psychosocial wellbeing, health and social capital. The findings show that the main underlying driver of vulnerability in Beitbridge district is the natural environment (drought limiting agricultural activities and livelihood options). In the face of limited work opportunities the sex trade is being supported through infrastructure such as the border post, business centres, brothels, shebeens and cattle trading pens. The effects of the underlying causes include lack of human capital and limited access to basic social services as well as their psycho-social implications. These dimensions have the capacity to act positively or negatively to influence resilience and vulnerability. For example, while circumcision is being promoted in a positive sense to reduce the spread of HIV this results in some people's risk perceptions being reduced thereby promoting their vulnerability to HIV. Another example is that while churches through their teachings are providing psycho-social support to some people, to other people non-adherence to treatment is a result of the same teachings. Some NGOs in Beitbridge are however, providing support to reduce vulnerability, for example, vocational skills support by the Lutheran Development Services.

In Malawi, the main dimensions include environmental factors, institutional factors, social capital, human capital and infrastructure. The underlying causes of vulnerability of the communities to floods and drought relate to the environment within which the households operate. Rain-fed agricultural production in conditions where floods and prolonged dry spells are recurrent makes households vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty, particularly households affected by HIV and AIDS. Infrastructure to support irrigation to address the chronic food insecurity is also inadequate and, in many cases, unavailable. To manage the effects of the drought and floods, households rely on social capital through social and community networks. Among HIV and AIDS affected households, the HIV and AIDS support groups provide psychosocial support to its members that help them to cope with the effects of droughts and flooding. Households also use human capital, especially in the form of skills, knowledge and labour to undertake different livelihood strategies to be able to withstand the effects of drought and/or flooding. The most common strategy is the sale of household labour to other people's farms or working at the nearby sugar plantation. Further, institutional factors also provide important coping and adaptive strategies to communities in the face of drought and flooding. In the study communities, there is a strong presence of local and international NGOs that do not only provide relief items during episodes of floods or drought, but they also undertake programmes that aim at providing long-term resilience of the communities. Such initiatives include the development of irrigation infrastructure, training communities on flood early warning and preparedness, provision of drought-tolerant crops (such as cassava) and construction of dykes to protect household and community infrastructure from flood waters.

For both Pyramid and Ga-Dikgale communities in South Africa, the analyses generated the following dimensions; wealth, human capital, social capital, psychosocial factors, health, infrastructure, institutional & governance factors, security and environment. The underlying cause of vulnerability in Pyramid is infrastructure unlike in Ga-Dikgale where it is environmental. People mostly cope with the infrastructural problem and environmentally induced challenges using available means such as social grants from government, keeping of livestock, such as cattle and goats, and engagement in small businesses. Other dimensions such as social capital, institutions or governance have potential to generate support that could lessen the vulnerability of households. For example, with a good community support system (social capital) and the assistance of formal institutions (such as the Department of Social Welfare giving social grants), households that are affected by HIV/AIDS can become less vulnerable to poverty, unemployment and food insecurity.

Resilience dimensions within the Southern African region

While the resilience dimensions across the four communities (3 rural and one peri-urban community) within the three Southern Africa countries studied overlap and the nexus of high burden of HIV with poverty were common features, the underlying drivers of vulnerability and support dimensions were somewhat different in each of these communities.

The natural environment, namely drought, was considered underlying drivers of vulnerability in rural communities of Dikgale in South Africa, Beitbridge in Zimbabwe and Chikwawa in Malawi. However, the Chikwawa community also have the additional environmental shock of floods. Strikingly different

was the observation that infrastructural constraints namely poor housing was considered an underlying driver of vulnerability in peri-urban community of Pyramid.

With regards to supportive dimensions, savings/credit schemes run by support groups in communities in South Africa and Zimbabwe and the social grant system provided by the national government in South Africa were considered key support for reducing the effects of the underlying causes of vulnerabilities and improving well-being. However, government played a relatively smaller role in Zimbabwe and Malawi where social safety net programmes run by civil society/NGO were considered key interventions to reducing vulnerabilities and improving well-being.

Put together, a threshold or a 'buffer' dimension supporting resilience in the short-term for all communities appears to be related to the psychosocial dimension (motivation, with or without support groups, to see beyond their current situation) which provides for strengthening individual agency in accessing social support available that can then help reduce vulnerability. However, in the longer-term, the buffer for sustaining and strengthening resilience lies in the human capital dimension and specifically skills-building that provides opportunities to diversify and/or maintain income-generation or protecting wealth (e.g. entrepreneurship, farming or early-warning technologies).

See example of the Resilience Framework for Pyramid below.

RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK- PYRAMID

