

- Suffer a significant loss of income and support services and these affect their standard of living;
- Are usually overworked, have little time to themselves and are thus hard to reach and mobilize.
- Are pushed below the poverty threshold, which directly threatens the survival and well-being of their families.

Female-headed-households affected by AIDS become entrenched in poverty, as, in addition to the loss of labour and cash income, women have fewer legal rights than men, are often less literate than men, and have less access to support services, credit and inputs. This feminization of poverty has far reaching consequences particularly for youths, with girls/young women being most affected. Given the prevalence of the disease, the marked increase in poverty among young women and their dependants is likely to have a profound impact on this region as a whole, particularly on food security, as it is women who are mainly responsible for food production.

The Impact of HIV/AIDS on the Household Economy

The impact of HIV/AIDS ranges from breakdown to disintegration of family, depending on whether one or both parents have died. Families affected by HIV/AIDS face the following economic challenges:

- They have to cope with depleted their meagre resources and savings from costly treatment and funerals.
- Deprivation of labour.
- Inadequate cash income and access to credit.
- Inadequate support services.
- In widow-headed household children may be unattended.
- The widow's own health and life may deteriorate as a result of exhaustion and less food intake.
- Older children help with household chores and with agricultural activities.
- Land area under cultivation may be reduced because of labour shortages.
- Loss of access to labour in the land may result in declining agricultural productivity that in combination with loss of cash income often leads to deterioration of the quality of household diet and reduction in the number of meals.

Women and female-headed households are particularly vulnerable to the impact of HIV/AIDS. At the same time, women, girls tend to bear the burden of caring for the sick family member, and often have less care and support when they themselves are infected. The disturbing trend of HIV/AIDS is the growing number of orphans, and the increasing number of child-headed households.

Policy Implications of HIV/AIDS

Some of the challenges that need to be addressed in order to deal with the complexity of the problems faced by families owing to HIV/AIDS are:

- Instituting long-term policies that change paternalistic practices and end women's economic dependency on men.
- Putting in place policies to correct occupational segregation, gender inequality, and feminization of poverty.