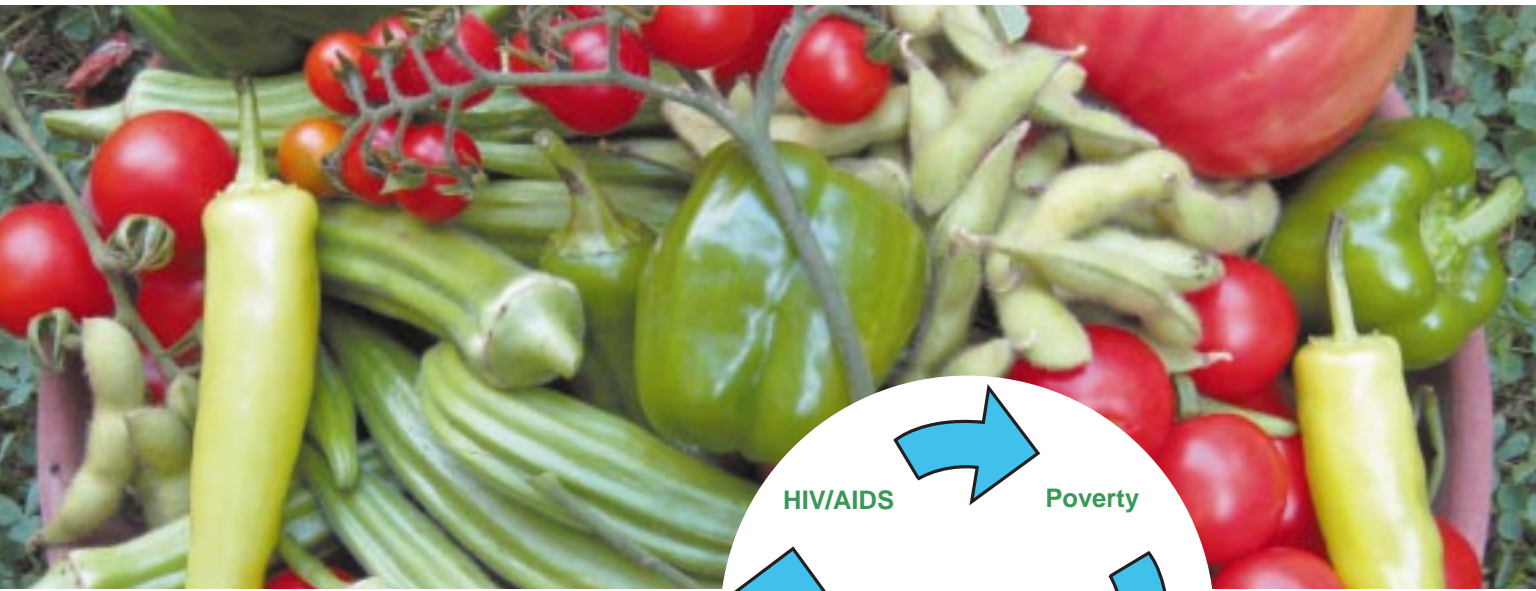


HOUSEHOLD NUTRITION GARDENS: A TIMELY RESPONSE TO FOOD INSECURITY AND HIV/AIDS IN AFRICA

< By Joe Dever >



Poor families all over Africa - rural and urban, agricultural and nonagricultural - face seasonal or chronic constraints in maintaining their food security. Families are food secure when they have, to use the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) definition, "physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs in order to lead a healthy and productive life." Food security therefore depends on availability (the proximity of sufficient quantities of food), access (the ability of households to purchase or barter for the available food), and utilization (their ability to properly prepare and store food and their knowledge of basic nutrition, health, and child care practices). Discussing two USAID projects implemented by DAI in food-insecure contexts in Africa, this article briefly reviews a development model that

addresses all three of these factors while mitigating the related economic and health impacts of HIV/AIDS.

Food security is directly linked to the health status of poor households. Not only has the disease ravaged Africa's agricultural workforce, with predictable effects on food supply and reliability, but HIV/AIDS-affected households are particularly vulnerable to diminished food security. HIV-positive people are severely affected by poor nutrition (meaning the quality as opposed to quantity of food), for example, and they have additional energy and nutritional requirements, especially if receiving anti-retroviral therapy. Reeling under the

economic impacts of HIV/AIDS (see Table 1), affected households and communities are frequently sucked into a vicious cycle in which poverty leads to reduced food security, in turn causing malnutrition and a propensity to engage in risky behavior for survival, which further spreads the disease and deepens poverty. For example, HIV/AIDS-affected households often suffer diminished access to food because - with family members either sick or caring for the sick - there is less household labor to grow crops or earn wages, at the same time as the family faces escalating medical or burial costs. Effective support for HIV/AIDS-affected households, therefore, must address food

Table 1. Economic Impacts of HIV/AIDS

Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased mortality and morbidity • Increased workload to care for the sick and orphans • More work with fewer able bodies
Financial capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased revenue and increased costs • Loss of assets
Human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased knowledge transfer • Decreased levels of education
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased transaction costs due to loss of established relationships • Breakdown of community support structures

security and livelihood needs as a complement to the treatment, prevention, and care activities central to most AIDS programming. One relatively low-cost, easily replicable, and sustainable intervention to address these needs involves household nutrition gardens (HNGs), an innovative approach incorporating drip irrigation technology, which increases yields and requires less time, water, and labor than normal watering systems - a crucial consideration given that the sick, the old, and the very young increasingly shoulder the burden of labor in AIDS-affected households.

HOUSEHOLD NUTRITION GARDENS IN ZIMBABWE

DAI first implemented HNGs on a large scale in USAID's Linkages for the Economic Advancement of the Disadvantaged (LEAD) project, which ran in Zimbabwe from 2001 to 2006. LEAD began as a classic microenterprise and microfinance project but changed drastically as the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe worsened. Microfinance strategies gave way to poverty lending. Commercial linkages were modified to deliver food security and income benefits for the poor. And LEAD's HIV interventions shifted toward HNGs as the food security situation deteriorated further.

The HNG program was enormously successful in providing large-scale HIV/AIDS economic mitigation while simultaneously addressing the food crisis. LEAD helped

establish more than 25,000 gardens, serving an average of 150,000 to 175,000 people, 80% of them HIV/AIDS affected. Participants saw a substantial increase in food production and were able to boost household income by selling half their crops for an average return of approximately \$20 per crop cycle per household. Not only did LEAD's drip irrigation kits have labor-saving qualities appropriate for vulnerable people, but the kit renewed attention on home gardening as a nutritional supplement and income-earning activity. Impressed by the program, the UK Department for International Development, for example, launched its own HNG initiative.

TACKLING FOOD SECURITY IN ETHIOPIA'S HIV/AIDS-AFFECTED HOUSEHOLDS

Having taken HNGs from an innovative pilot to a core food security strategy, DAI's LEAD consultants subsequently established another highly regarded initiative for USAID, the Urban Agriculture Program for HIV-Affected Women (UAPHAW), a relatively small program (\$2.2 million) that has also attracted \$1.4 million in direct funding from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Since 2004, UAPHAW has assisted women in urban areas to establish HNGs in small plots close to their homes. The women receive drip-irrigation kits, training in how to use and maintain them, training in gardening, instruction on nutrition and crop selection, and assistance in linking to markets where

they can sell surplus produce. Given the space restrictions of the urban environment, "grow bags" - a rudimentary technology used in tandem with drip irrigation - are increasingly popular.

The combination of simple, innovative technology with training and assistance services is essential to making UAPHAW a self-sustaining food security and economic development program rather than merely a short-term mitigation activity. Once households receive the initial HNG kits and training, they can grow vegetables indefinitely into the future without additional assistance. They maintain soil fertility through improved use of compost and manure, for instance, and either retain seed from their crops or retain earnings to buy seeds. Income from sales can be used to replace worn-out kits, which have a lifespan of seven years. In addition to opening up outlets for produce, DAI's market linkages team has developed the supply of drip kits from local suppliers so people can replace drip irrigation systems themselves, locally.

UAPHAW provides many of its services through 21 local community outreach partners, which it funds through cash grants to support project implementation and in-kind grants for equipment. DAI's highly participatory training and learning approaches emphasize the involvement of project staff, community outreach partners, beneficiaries, and relevant government departments at all stages. This structure maximizes the impact of limited training resources and builds local capacity to sustain the HNG intervention over the long term. The partners may or may not be subpartners under current PEPFAR programs, but through working with UAPHAW they are all linked to PEPFAR Ethiopia's HIV/AIDS Care and Treatment Program. UAPHAW simply overlays its HNG program on top of the HIV/AIDS services beneficiaries are already receiving from community outreach partners.

As in Zimbabwe, the HNG program in

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Ethiopia has showed itself eminently scalable. By mid-2008, the project will have equipped 15,000 households with gardens, directly benefiting 60,000 people, 20,000 of them children. Of the nearly 4,000 gardens established since October 2007, 28% are managed by child-headed households, and 42% are managed by women-headed households, demonstrating the project's ability to reach the most vulnerable household members. Families typically consume approximately 60% of their produce, with the surplus sold to generate an income of roughly \$5 per household per month. Less quantifiable but no less real

to the families involved - as project staff can attest - are the psychosocial benefits of being able to take greater control of their own food security and livelihoods.

In short, UAPHAW is a success. "The urban gardening project in Addis Ababa is the kind of effort USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore would like to see expanded," wrote USAID in its FrontLines publication in January 2008. With international food price inflation prompting fears of a food crisis in Africa, one can see why USAID or other international actors would want to replicate it. As a sustainable, scalable,

cost-effective intervention that addresses all three elements of food security—food availability, accessibility, and utilization - while simultaneously addressing both the nutritional and economic needs of HIV/AIDS - affected households, the HNG program would seem to have much to recommend it to donors and policy makers in Africa and beyond. ●

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SPECIALTY FOOD

FOOD MARKETING SOLUTIONS FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

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needed on-the-ground support, financial resources, and powerful friends. While I attribute much of the success of the African specialty foods program to our pioneering manufacturers, I would certainly give equal billing to the countless organizations that have focused their attention on promoting Africa's well being. Groups like USAID, The International Executive Services Corp, Carana Corporation, Bearing Point, SAIBL, The Corporate Council on Africa, The United Nations Development Program, and Dr. Jeffrey Sachs' Millennium Villages Project have all provided tremendous initiatives with one concept in mind: Give Africa a chance. This level of support is new for us in the specialty food industry. Typically, support comes in the form of one trade representative at the local consulate who is generally unwilling or unable to offer much assistance. These organizations, and the countless others not mentioned, deserve all the praise and admiration that could be offered for their continuous drive to promote Africa's future.

NEXT STEPS FOR AFRICAN SPECIALTY FOODS

It has been, and will continue to be, a tremendous journey for Talier Trading Group and me personally to be part of the development and growth of the African specialty food industry. While much has been done, it is important to learn from our experiences and continue pushing forward with this viable concept. Specifically, there are three areas which need additional emphasis.

First, we must continue to define what products can and should be coming out of the various countries in Africa. Manufacturers must continue to embrace the concept of marketing their distinctive cultures and unique cuisines to the world. Choma Sauce from East Africa and Jollof Rice Mix from West Africa are two examples of cultural products that would be well-received in the U.S. markets.

Second, we must continue to petition for increased attention to regions of Africa still in need of a presence in the global marketplace. Countries like Mali, Senegal,

Rwanda, and Ethiopia are overflowing with potential and simply need additional inputs and attention. Can you imagine a range of baking products from Mali? There are hundreds of producers who can make that happen.

Third and finally, we need to continue to push the positive image of Africa. Africa's image is continuing to change at a ferocious pace, and all in the right direction. Organizations like The Africa Channel, Africa News, International Trade Promotions, South African Airlines, and The African Travel Association continue to be instrumental in promoting the good name of Africa. With such strong links between tourism and specialty food, these organizations are critical in the continued growth of African specialty foods. ●

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