



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Mainstreaming Kenya's National Climate Change Action Plan into the HIV/AIDS Sector

Introduction: The National AIDS and STIs Control Programme (NAS COP) reports that HIV and AIDS have had a devastating impact on all sectors of the Kenyan society. At the height of the HIV epidemic, HIV prevalence was as high as 30 per cent among some populations in the country. The Kenyan government declared HIV/AIDS a national disaster and created a national program to increase awareness and advocacy for the prevention of new infections and management of existing cases. Consequently, the prevalence of HIV has stabilised at 7 per cent, although the number of new cases still remains high.¹

Risks and Impacts: The background vulnerabilities that create the conditions for increasing the risk of HIV infection can be directly or indirectly influenced by climate change. Increasing growth and mobility of the population, overcrowding in cities and slums, and households with poor sanitation are factors that contribute to increased rates of HIV/AIDS and are exacerbated by extreme weather events and climate change. Chronically poor environmental conditions and extreme weather events create conditions that are conducive to the development of diseases, the spread of infectious diseases through migration, food shortages and, most relevant for the case of HIV/AIDS, forcing people to increase their mobility or engage in risky behaviours or activities for survival which they would otherwise not have engaged in.²

Climate change can place a disproportionate burden on women, children and other disadvantaged members of society, potentially increasing behaviours that could increase risk of HIV infection. Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable to climate change if they are not financially stable because they have fewer coping mechanisms. When the availability of food, fuel, clean water and other necessities is threatened by extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, some women have had to resort to commercial sex work as a "coping strategy" to sustain their families. This exposes them to the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other related sexually transmitted diseases. The results of the 2008-2009 Kenya Demographic Health Survey showed that the HIV prevalence rate for young women (15-29 years) was four times the rate for young men in the same age group.³ In addition, women are burdened with the need to care for those who fall sick to the pandemic, further reducing their productivity.

The practice of marrying off young/underage girls to old and polygamous men is still widespread among some Kenyan communities despite sensitisation campaigns against such practices. Currently, there is no literature on the linkages between climate change and early/childhood marriage in Kenya and therefore its influence on the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, it may be correct to postulate that climate change does enhance the practice of marrying off underage girls and increasing their exposure to HIV/AIDS. A family (often a father) that has been impacted by more frequent and severe droughts may be forced to marry off their daughter in order to receive dowry (in the form of cash, cattle and grains) that could be used to temporarily meet the family's sustenance. In other words, child marriage offers economic incentives for poor parents, for whom the bride price is often a source of livelihood. In Kinango in Kwale County where the practice is widespread with an average bride age of 12 years, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are some of the highest in Kenya.⁴

Climate change may increase the spread of HIV/AIDS through its inducement of rural to urban migration. Migration can facilitate the spread of an infectious disease because it brings more people into contact with each other, moves migrants away from their usual sexual partners and liberates them from the social controls of their home areas. In addition, infected migrants can infect people when they return to their villages.⁵



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Recommended Actions: The National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) does not provide specific recommendations in regard to HIV/AIDS and climate change, but there is common ground, especially between climate change adaptation and HIV/AIDS responses. Empowering women and girls, especially through investments in health and education, can help boost economic development and reduce poverty, thus having a beneficial impact on coping with climate change. Girls with more education are more likely to protect themselves against HIV and to have smaller and healthier families as adults. In general, access to reproductive health services such as family planning means lower fertility rates, which has a bearing on reducing the potential impact of environmental crises and making sustainable development more likely. Specific recommendations from the literature include:

- *Integrate climate change actions into HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness projects.* Actions to improve women's situation, such as efficient cookstoves, can be integrated as components in HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives. Creating economic opportunities in communities can prevent migration and travel to urban areas, which can increase the risk of contracting HIV. Climate change initiatives can be integrated with HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness projects, especially if they are targeting the same stakeholders.
- *Consider gender in the design of adaptation and mitigation strategies and programmes.* For instance, mitigation strategies targeting household energy usage need to consider that women are the most affected. Energy efficient cookstoves and solar lamps can help address the challenge of energy poverty experienced by many women, but the benefits of such programs must be directed to women. Similarly, adaptation measures in the agricultural sector should consider the important role played by women in food production and the need to direct programs toward women farmers.
- *Engage women in HIV/AIDS and climate change decision making and planning.* Women are more vulnerable to climate change because of their gender, and it is important that women participate in planning processes to adapt to climate change and to increased awareness of HIV/AIDS.⁶
- *Develop entrepreneurial skills of men and women* to enable them engage in income generating activities in their villages so as to stem rural to urban migration and the associated risks of the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- *Collect and strengthen assessment and information* on HIV/AIDS and climate change.



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Conclusion: The linkages between climate change and HIV/AIDS have been established. At the heart of the matter is meeting basic livelihood needs. Empowering women and girls, who are particularly at risk, through investments in health and education can help boost income-earning potential and reduce poverty, thus having a beneficial impact on coping with climate change. Girls with more education are more likely to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and to have smaller and healthier families as adults. Developing the entrepreneurial skills of men and women to enable them engage in income generating activities in their villages could help to reduce rural to urban migration and the associated risk of spread of HIV/AIDS is another way of addressing the climate change/migration and HIV/AIDS nexus.

¹ National AIDS and STIs Control Programme (NASCOP). 2012. *About Us*. Accessed at: <http://nascop.or.ke/aboutus.php>.

² Gomme, R., du Guerny, J., Glantz, M.H. and Hsu, L.N. 2004. *Climate and HIV/AIDS: A hotspots analysis for Early Warning Rapid Response Systems*. Bangkok: United Nations Development Programme; Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization; Colorado: National Center for Atmospheric Research.

³ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and ICF Macro. 2010. *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2008-09*. Calverton, Maryland: KNBS and ICF Macro.

⁴ Plan International. *Plan International's Submission to the Joint CRC and CEDAW General Comment / General Recommendation on Harmful Practices*. Accessed at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/cedaw_crc_contributions/PlanInternational.pdf.

⁵ Caldwell, J. C., Anarfi, J.K and Caldwell, P. 1997. "Mobility, Migration, Sex, STDs, and AIDS, An Essay on Sub-Saharan Africa with Other Parallels." In G. Herdt. *Sexual Cultures and Migration in the Era of AIDS: Anthropological and Demographic Perspectives*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pages 41-54.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2007. *Human Development Report 2007-2008. Fighting climate change: human solidarity in a divided world*. New York: UNDP.