HIV/AIDS and Conservation: What can the conservation sector do?

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Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group member organizations:
Links Between HIV/AIDS & the Natural Environment

- Int’l
- National
- Community
- Household
- Individual
Loss of Community Capacity

- Loss of community champions
- Breakdown of governance structures for resource management
- Loss of indigenous knowledge
- Loss of time for conservation (more time spent nursing the sick and meeting basic needs – especially for women)
Changes in land use

- greater use of fire due to agricultural labor shortage
- increased soil erosion due to changing agricultural practices
- land management changes due to shifts in ownership and loss of indigenous knowledge
Resource user groups at high risk

Resource users and traders who travel away from home are particularly at risk, for example:

• fishing communities where men land catches away from home, e.g. Lake Victoria
• trading communities where women have to travel to trade resources, e.g. Maputo charcoal merchants
Role of traditional healers

Medicinal plants are used to treat opportunistic infections in many communities in Africa
e.g. Tanga AIDS Working Group, Tanzania, (partnership of traditional healers and government hospital) has treated 4800 AIDS patients with herbal remedies, reporting :

• increased appetite and weight gain
• stop diarrhea, reduce fever
• eliminate oral thrush, cure herpes zoster
• cure ulcers, rashes and fungus
Impacts on medicinal plants

Traditional healers in 6-site Malawi/Mozambique study reported increased scarcity of 32 medicinal species, driven by:

- increase in destructive harvesting (85% of healers)
- increased commercial harvesting by outsiders (69%)
- conversion of forest land (54%)
- policies prohibiting collection (23%)

(Barany et al. 2005, Miombo woodland study)
Impacts on Conservation Capacity

loss of capacity in conservation organizations
• WWF/CAR government lost 3 out of 10 key senior staff from Dzanga-Sangha program
• KwaZulu Natal Wildlife lost 9% of its 3000 staff
• Wildlife & Environmental Society of Malawi lost 7 of 50 staff
• a fire awareness program in Southern Africa lost 10 out of 12 extensionists
Vulnerability of Conservation Sector

- protected area staff are posted to remote areas away from families
- drivers and community workers are frequently away from home, visiting different areas
- law enforcement officers may use undue influence over local women
- law enforcement staff often rotated between protected areas to reduce corruption/build experience
- HIV/AIDS awareness is often low and prevention not promoted (e.g. condom availability)
Impacts on Conservation Organizations

- loss of productivity – e.g. law enforcement, policy, research, education, tourism, community work, protected area management
- loss of institutional memory
- threat to conservation partnerships
- loss of training investment (e.g. $40,000 for masters)
- diversion of conservation funds for AIDS costs, e.g. funerals, sick leave, training for new staff
Longer Term Impacts

- Social, economic and environmental impacts have not yet peaked
- Impacts on national and international security, and law and order
- AIDS orphans increasing – low education, future ‘youth bulge’ – less commitment to sound land and natural resource management
- Increased food insecurity, poverty, natural resource depletion and environmental degradation
What can the conservation sector do?

• The health sector is not addressing the AIDS/conservation linkage
• a multi-sectoral approach is needed
• the conservation community needs to take action
Maintain Conservation Capacity

- Develop HIV/AIDS workplace policies
- Promote awareness, VCT and wellness programs
- Overcome stigma and discrimination
- Reduce remoteness of staff from families
- Consider providing ARV drugs for staff
- Integrate HIV/AIDS in planning and fundraising
- Partner with other sectors to find solutions
Modify Training Programs

• train more people on shorter courses, broadening skill base
• incorporate HIV/AIDS in conservation curricula and college policies
• reduce separation of staff from families during training (e.g. distance learning)
• provide pre-departure HIV/AIDS awareness
• mentor junior staff who take over senior jobs
Maintain Community Capacity

Since the conservation community works in remote rural areas often with poor access to health services, integrate HIV/AIDS into community conservation programs (with health partners):

- promote HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, and focus on vulnerable groups
- promote VCT and treatment where possible
- integrate HIV/AIDS in population-health-environment projects as appropriate
Attention! Le SIDA Existe!

Abstenence, Fidélité, Condom !
Namibia Association of CBNRM Support Organizations (NACSO)’s HIV/AIDS project has potential to reach one tenth of Namibia’s population through communal conservancies, in remote, underserved areas cascading through 3 levels:

- support organizations
- conservancy structures
- communities
Help Community Livelihoods

- Promote sustainable livelihoods through sound resource/land use with low labor inputs
- Promote labor-saving agriculture
- Promote revenue-generating enterprises (e.g. tourism)
- Establish grant funds for communities’ relief efforts
Improve management of medicinal plants

- strengthen traditional healer associations
- train community members in sustainable harvesting
- strengthen tenure and governance – control outsiders and enforce community collection rules
- cultivate plants in gardens (easy access, but technical challenges); plant seedlings in forest
- increase efficiency of extraction of active ingredients
- continue research on medicinal plants
Empower women and girls

- promote women’s health (including family planning – dual service delivery with HIV prevention); negotiation of safe sex
- promote women’s resource management and livelihood programs
- strengthen women’s resource governance roles
- promote girls’ education
- promote changes in land inheritance policies and practices
- encourage will-making in rural areas
Help orphans

- mentor youth in natural resource management
- document/foster indigenous knowledge
- encourage education
- promote training and employment for orphans (e.g. Umzi Wethu project)
- assist orphan support through natural resource enterprises
Scaling up efforts

- resolution at World Conservation Congress for IUCN and members to take action
- studies to increase understanding and quantify impacts
- manual for conservation sector
- national programs to roll out efforts:
  - national workshops
  - assistance with workplace policies
  - mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in community conservation programs
- targeting conservation/natural resource training institutions
- taking African experiences to next-wave regions
- networking and capacity-building
Challenges

• overcoming stigma
• finding and mentoring conservation-HIV/AIDS champions
• developing partnerships
• working within limitations of health infrastructure
• gathering quantitative information to make a stronger case for multi-sectoral approach
• monitoring impacts of interventions
• fundraising for multi-sectoral approaches, especially at international levels