

## Book Reviews / Revues de Livres

### ***HIV/AIDS and Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa: Impact on Farming Systems, Agricultural Practices and Rural Livelihoods – An Overview and Annotated Bibliography***

By Tanja R Muller, *African women leaders in agriculture and the environment (AWLAE) Series No. 1, Wageningen Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 2004.*  
ISBN: 9076998469.

The publication is the first in a 3-part series produced by the African Women Leaders in Agriculture and the Environment (AWLAE) Programme based at Wageningen University, which has the overall objective of providing a resource base on the most critical issues in rural development in the context of HIV and AIDS. The second publication will explore the linkages between gender and HIV/AIDS, with a focus on rural women and their role in food security and caregiving. The third publication will discuss the epidemic as a wider development issue, as well as focus on agriculture-based mitigation strategies.

The book, written by Tanja Muller, looks particularly at HIV/AIDS and agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa and describes the impact of the pandemic as it has emerged over the last decades at different levels of the sector, namely the farming system level, the livelihood level, and the household level. Lesser-researched areas such as the agricultural estate sector and pastoralism are also discussed. An overarching issue is the centrality of gender in understanding and addressing the multiple impacts on this sector in general and household food security in particular.

The book comprises two parts: an essay outlining the major issues and summarising recent research, followed by an annotated bibliography introducing the most relevant literature (with the proviso that it focuses particularly on literature available within the Netherlands). A publication of 100 pages is not intended to provide a comprehensive review of the subject or literature, but it certainly provides a well-structured overview of some key texts that are useful for a diverse audience ranging from field practitioners to academics. The definition of key concepts at the outset of the book and a selection of worldwide web resources position the book as an excellent starting point to a complex subject.

Tanja Muller identifies three key reasons why it is important to look specifically at HIV/AIDS and agriculture and rural livelihoods. Firstly, while prevalence might be higher in urban areas, the absolute numbers of people living with HIV is likely to be much higher in rural areas, not least because two-thirds of the population is rural in the African context – and recognising that under-reporting and misdiagnosis is more likely in these areas. Even in rapidly urbanising countries like South Africa the rural emphasis on the epidemic is highlighted through urban-rural linkages. Secondly, there is a tendency that the burden of the epidemic is shifted to rural areas as migrant workers return to their homes once full-blown AIDS has evolved. This cost is increased as support from the urban economy is diminished as urban remittances dry up. Thirdly, in macro-economic terms, the countries most affected by HIV/AIDS are those most heavily reliant on agriculture, with the sector accounting for a significant portion of production as well as employing the majority of workers. In addition, small-scale and subsistence agriculture remains an important component of diverse livelihood strategies for the majority of households living in these countries. This emphasis also suggests that agriculture clearly has an important role to play in preventing and mitigating the effects of the epidemic.

Muller identifies the need to look carefully at three different levels when studying HIV/AIDS impact – the household level, the livelihood level and the farming system level – and to relate the findings of each within an integrated system. This allows a level of analysis that recognises that the impact of the pandemic varies from place to place and that responses might need to be farming system or livelihood specific. The impact of HIV/AIDS is systemic, as the effect on one component is likely to influence the others as well. Thus the linkages between sub-sectors, institutions, and households need to be identified. Muller clearly works to identify these linkages in her analysis and assessment of the literature. She identifies an important gap in present knowledge as the systemic impact of the pandemic on gender roles in agricultural production. While it is generally argued that the small differences in terms of more equitable gender roles among households and communities can have a positive impact on food security in households afflicted or

affected by HIV and AIDS, and that the more food-secure households are those in which both genders are involved in diverse agricultural practices, little is known about the gender context of households that are able to cope with the impact and recover from food insecurity.

The text ends with a discussion of HIV and AIDS in relation to other shocks that befall rural livelihoods and calls for a more holistic research approach that integrates disaster literature with AIDS impact studies. This a relevant position for the southern African context, which is still facing an 'entangling crisis' of weakening livelihood strategies in the face of adverse climatic conditions, increasing liberalisation and reduction of State support for rural systems, adverse terms of trade, and weak governance – compounded by the multiple impacts of HIV and AIDS. This publication and the two to follow provide a starting point to begin to unravel and understand the complexities of rural livelihoods and agricultural production in the context of HIV and AIDS.

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