

Lobbying for the rights of people living with HIV to have food security and sustainable livelihoods in Mozambique

Background



Photo: Peter Caton/Tearfund

Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries. It is ranked 168 out of 177 in the Human Development Index, with 54 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and 34 per cent of families suffering from food insecurity. Natural disasters, such as widespread flooding, compound the poverty problem, particularly among those living with HIV.

Out of a population of 21 million, 1.5 million people in Mozambique are living with HIV, including 100,000 children under the age of 14.

HIV and livelihoods

Sustainable livelihoods are particularly important for people living with and affected by HIV. There is a two-way relationship between HIV and livelihoods:

- HIV undermines livelihood options as it can cause illness and death. For example, as people become ill, they cannot work in the fields or maintain a job. Parents dying of AIDS-related illnesses will not be able to teach their children important agricultural and vocational skills, putting the futures of those children at risk.
- Insecure livelihoods make people vulnerable to HIV. When livelihoods are not secure, the risk of contracting HIV can increase. Women may be forced to sell sex to survive.

Anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) are powerful and need to be taken with nourishment. Regular and nutritious meals are also needed to help the body's own defences fight the opportunistic infections associated with AIDS.

Without secure livelihoods, a person living with HIV may not be able to afford the good nutrition and medical costs which will enable them to remain healthy and strong. The nausea caused by taking ARVs on an empty stomach causes some people to abandon taking them altogether. People become trapped in a vicious cycle – too ill to work, and so they cannot buy the food they need to remain strong and healthy.

Tearfund's partner Rede Crista speaks out

Rede Crista ('Christian Network Against HIV'), made up of affiliated churches across the 10 provinces of the country, was established to mobilise the church in Mozambique to speak out and act on HIV.

In 2006, Rede Crista joined work with the National AIDS Council (Conselho Nacional Combat o Sida CNCS) as part of the food security and nutrition technical committee. It was through this committee that Rede Crista lobbied for policy changes that resulted in coming up with a draft law setting out the rights of people living with HIV to adequate food supplies and levels of nutrition. This was a call for new legislation aimed at putting people living with HIV on a par with everyone else in the population, rather than being ostracised and stigmatised.

Through meetings, phone calls and letter writing, relationships were established with all departments of the Mozambique government engaged in the specific areas on HIV and food security, from health to

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labour, and gradually the need for a change in the law was accepted. The resulting new legislation enshrines the rights of people living with HIV to health, livelihoods and food security.

Benefits of the new law

Following the passing of this statute, Rede Crista has been working with local churches, training them about the new law and how it applies at local levels. This is enabling churches to help people living with HIV claim their entitlements and to hold local authorities to account for providing them. The training targets community leaders and church leaders and provides practical demonstration of the process of accessing the basic social services for people living with HIV and orphans, the advantages of accessing the support and challenges as well as how to overcome the challenges.

The work has challenged church leaders across all denominations to see the problems in their communities and has given them a Biblically-inspired vision about what they can do to respond and to raise a voice for the poor in their communities.

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