

Ongoing research

Linley Chiwona-Karltun, Researcher/lecturer

Information technology with a human face-A collaborative research project to improve nutrition training in Africa and Asia” A Sida/SAREC funded educational research project 2003-2005



- a) a university- community link project involving production of interactive computer-based learning material for youth on the topic of HIV/AIDS in Malawi

THE PROCESS OF USING INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AS A WAY OF DISCUSSING HIV PREVENTION AMONG THE RURAL YOUTH IN MALAWI

Studies in Malawi reveal that young people as well as adults not only have the knowledge but also can describe in detail how HIV/AIDS is transmitted. Symptoms of HIV/AIDS are narrated without any problem. There is very little known and documented cultural understanding of process mechanisms that would support the prevention of HIV infection among the youth in rural Malawi. The aim of these studies is to elucidate the youth's perceptions and attitudes towards sexuality and HIV/AIDS and to acquire an understanding of the youths' livelihood strategies with respect to agriculture and food acquisition. We use participatory interactive approaches to explore the youth's perceptions. Preliminary findings reveal that knowledge regarding transmission and symptoms of HIV/AIDS were well known. The youth receive ample information about HIV/AIDS through the PSI-mobile film teams, UNICEF, radio, billboards, funerals, health centres and *chishango* condom advertisements.

"These films and messages have nothing to do with us", the youth say, "Because right now as we speak, our friends are undergoing initiation and that is important if you have to belong to a community. We want to make our own films about us and our reality. This is the season (post-harvest) that HIV/AIDS spreads nkhosi yo chosa fumbi".

Kuchosa fumbi, means tasting sex for the first time after pre-puberty boys and girls have successfully undergone their initiation ceremony. *Kuchosa fumbi* is a time that inadvertently condones intergenerational sex, a time that increases the risk for HIV transmission. As young people, the challenge of sustaining a meaningful livelihood is sometimes a question of turning a *blind eye* to their vulnerability. Although many of the young people produce more than ample agricultural produce, finding a market for their produce is difficult. At times a conscious decision is made to send "the girl" to market because she can quickly sell the produce, by bargaining sex, for *geni* (profit). "When the girl or woman comes back quicker than if a man had gone to sell the produce, we do not ask how she did it". Better life chances, gender equality, upward social mobility, and material necessities are key factors cited by the youth as a major means to curbing HIV/AIDS in rural Africa. In these studies we use digital camera photography, computers, video and mobile phone communication and combine it with creative drawings, poem recitals, story writing and telling. Thought provoking songs and dances composed by the youth were captured with video recording. These findings are to be compiled in interactive open source software called virtual training Studio (VTS). The story of "*kuchosa fumbi*" is being carried out with the permission and blessing of the village chiefs, the youth, and farmers in Domasi in collaboration with the University of Malawi.

Food security, Rural Livelihoods and Health

Background:

Pro-poor cassava research and development is an important determinant for improving food security in rural as well as urban areas in Africa especially in the context of HIV/AIDS. The inability for many farmers to purchase inputs, the gradual shift from shifting cultivation to continuous sedentary perennial farming and the small rate of nutrient replacement in the soil compels many subsistence farmers to adopt cassava farming on a larger scale. Compared to the widely adopted maize crop, cassava requires less man/woman hours for both care and labour. However, rural undeveloped infrastructure makes the marketing of cassava in Malawi a limited viable option, at the same time cassava provides a golden option for poor farmers. The fact that the plant can be useful in entirety both as human and animal food as well as for industry lends support for cassava having the possibility of ensuring a food security revolution in Malawi. The question is what is needed for a cassava revolution to take off in Malawi.

Overall Aim

To elucidate factors that deters a cassava revolution in Malawi given the comparative advantage of cassava over maize.

Specific objectives

1. describe push and pull factors that affect cassava production
2. explore pathways for promoting cassava production through novel approaches such as cassava clubs and farmer field schools
3. elucidate the role of access to markets and the incipient forces for transforming cassava from a food security crop to an urban staple and commercial crop
4. develop and test new cassava products with users and end-users based on available and emerging improved cassava varieties
5. conduct value chain analysis of cassava production in selected areas and market outlets
6. establish a cassava network at grassroots level as a resource-base for cassava farmers in collaboration with local agricultural institutions



Ongoing research collaborations

- ❖ Participatory varietal selection and in-field management of cassava with rural farmers in Malawi; in collaboration with, Wageningen University; Chancellor College; University of Malawi; Makoka Agricultural Research Station, Malawi <http://www.unima.mw>
- ❖ Elucidating the cassava production to consumption chain: harnessing on to local market opportunities with novel cassava products in collaboration with, Wageningen University; University of Malawi; Makoka Agricultural Research Station, Malawi
- ❖ The role of improved access to markets in curbing HIV/AIDS among youth; in collaboration with The Polytechnic and Chancellor College University of Malawi; <http://www.unima.mw>
- ❖ Does ICT offer improved opportunities for delivering nutrition and HIV/AIDS messages among school-dropouts? In collaboration with The Polytechnic and Chancellor College, University of Malawi <http://www.unima.mw>
- ❖ Southern African Universities regional learning, production and testing of Nutrition and HIV/AIDS web-based and CD-ROM undergraduate learning material in collaboration with Stellenbosch University, South Africa; University of Zambia; University of Swaziland; The Polytechnic, University of Malawi; University of Zimbabwe; University of Botswana (SafrITAN) <http://www.itananutrition.org/safritan/>
- ❖ Making soil last – participatory soil management with farmers in Ethiopia: understanding farmers coping mechanisms with declining soil fertility. In collaboration with Department of Soil Sciences, SLU; Addis Abeba University and Wondo Genet College Forestry College, Ethiopia <http://www.d-univ.edu.et/DUAcademics/Wondogent.htm>
- ❖ Peasant Production and limits to Labour in Malawi. In collaboration with Lund University; Mzuzu University Malawi and Chancellor College, Malawi <http://www.unima.mw/> <http://www.mzuni.ac.mw/>
- ❖ Stigma, HIV/AIDS and health seeking care patterns of illegal immigrants in Sweden. In collaboration with Department of Public Health, Karolinska Institutet.
- ❖ Being a “poor woman”: behaving according to the norms of micro-finance. In collaboration with Uppsala University and Chancellor College University of Malawi.
- ❖ Gender and social equity in health research and policies in collaboration Department of Social Medicine, Karolinska Institutet http://www.phs.ki.se/socmed/gender_social_equity/index_en.html
- ❖ Cassava transformation processes in Southern Africa in collaboration with Lund University