

## **WORLD FOOD PRIZE SYMPOSIUM October 2001**

### **Marcela Villarreal**

Thank you very much. I know that by now we should have probably ended this session, so I will try my best to make it as fast as I can so that we can then proceed to our own food security. I would like to thank very much the World Food Prize for this opportunity to have me here and giving me the pleasure to address you this morning with this very important issue.

I'd like to talk about the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security, very specifically. Many of you might be asking yourselves, "Well, yes, we know that this is a very important problem. We know that there are so many people dying, but in the end what does it really have to do with agriculture? Why would the agriculture sector be involved? It's basically an issue for the health sector." Well, as my predecessor just said, actually, we are way past the time in which the issues could have been dealt with the health sector and the health sector alone. We need a response from any single sector, and obviously the agricultural sector has a huge role to play, not only because it feeds most of the poor people in the most-affected countries, but also because they depend on it for their livelihoods, and it employs up to 80% of the people in these most-affected countries.

What do we mean when we talk about food security? We talk basically about two issues: The capacity of people to produce their own food, and therefore they can eat it, or the capacity of people to buy their food. And both of these are affected very highly by HIV/AIDS. I would like to talk to you about four of the ways in which HIV/AIDS is affecting food security.

First of all, in a very clear way, a huge impact on the agricultural labor force. AIDS, unlike other diseases, hits mostly people of the productive ages. What does this mean? That people in the ages 15 to 49 are dying, and these are people who many times already have children, one or two or three children, and who are also the people on which society depends for its own production and for its own survival.

We have calculated in FAO that HIV/AIDS has already killed 7 million agricultural workers and that, if things continue this way, before 20 years, it could have already killed 16 million additional agricultural workers. And it's not only the death of an AIDS person that is having such a big impact on food security and on the community. By the time a person dies of HIV/AIDS, at least two-person years have been lost of labor. This is not only because a person who has AIDS is debilitated but also because the persons around this person have to take care of him or her.

In this map we see the way in which agricultural labor could be affected in the most affected countries. These are nine of the most affected countries in the world, all of them in South Sierra, Africa, and all of them close to each other; and it is not by coincidence that they are close to each other. We have the case of Namibia, for example, that could lose up to 26% of its agricultural labor force.

In this slide we can see the evolution of the epidemic and how it can be contained if appropriate action is taken at the highest political level. In the first case you see the case of Uganda. Uganda today has been very hard hit by the epidemic, as we all know, but we think that the epidemic can very well be contained. And here we illustrate the impact on the agricultural labor force.

The last two cases, for you of those in the back who are not able to read the letters, is Namibia and Mozambique. Now, Namibia and Mozambique have been relatively spared up to now, as you see in the blue bar, that is the year today, the year 2000. And the red bar is the year 2020. So if appropriate action is not taken, you can see how the situation can evolve in a very fast way.

I will skip this one, because I've already been told that I have to try to end. Another of the huge impacts that HIV/AIDS is having on the households is that they are impoverished immediately. The first thing that happens in an AIDS-affected household is that the assets are sold. And what does this mean? It means many times that the household sells its only cow or its little livestock or whatever they have as productive assets, in order to be able to take care of the sick, or afterwards to pay the costs of the funeral, which we know are very important in many of the African cultures. In Ethiopia a study has shown to us that the average cost of taking care of a person and afterwards for the funeral exceeds the average annual income of a farm household.

We also are seeing a number of changes in the way people are doing their agricultural activities in response to the epidemic. And one of them, a very important one, is a shift to less labor-intensive crops; because, obviously, labor is very scarce, and it's becoming more and more scarce. Land is falling fallow. People are shifting to whatever they can so that they can use less labor because there is no labor available. So this shift to less cash crops sometimes means also a shift to less nutritious crops. And this has a very big impact on the people who are suffering from HIV/AIDS.

We know that a person living with AIDS needs a higher intake of bulk protein and calories. And we know that the people around this person are becoming more vulnerable because the household is impoverished. And there is a very preoccupying case here with tuberculosis. Households, because they are impoverished, have less nutrition for all of the members. And the moment the person living with AIDS catches tuberculosis (that is on the rise and very fast), it suffices for this person to sneeze into the air for the whole of the household to be vulnerable to getting themselves tuberculosis; because all of them are less well-nourished because of the impoverishment of the household. So we see that it is not only HIV/AIDS, it's a number, a host of related factors.

We heard about issues of long-term, short-term and how we should be changing our mindsets and to looking more into the future and changing African mentality to look more into the medium or long term. Well, unfortunately, with the cost of this epidemic, this is not going to be so easy.

One of the issues which we are seeing, and which my predecessor already talked about, is transmission of knowledge. Transmission of knowledge between generations is being undermined. And this is not only the knowledge that is received at the household level from parents to children, because let's remember, a lot of the generation of parents is disappearing.

It's not only at that level; the children are not receiving anymore of the agricultural skills and knowledge that they were receiving from their parents. It's also that the schoolteachers are dying, and it's also that the extension workers themselves are dying. So knowledge is being impaired at both the institutional and the household level. And we have seen – the lead economist who talked to us before showed us the importance of knowledge as the basis for future economic development.

There's a decrease in the range of crops that is being cultivated, and this, of course, is leading to a decrease in plant diversity and in genetic resources that are absolutely fundamental for the longer-term development... There are also safety nets that are being undermined. We know from African societies that an important part of food security comes through social safety nets when, if you fall sick, somebody else will take care of your children, somebody else will take care of your land. And when the other person falls sick, you take care of them in return. However, these others are as affected as you are, and so nobody is being able to take care of the land, but... nobody is being able to really cope with the number of orphans that is increasing. So in many cases, what this is leading to is to an irreversible collapse of the social asset base.

So what is this ... to us regarding the possibilities of development, the possibilities of rural development in Africa? We are seeing that ...all of the human, social and natural capital are being depleted, and these, as we know, are the pillars of the development or at least of the development as we know of it up to now.

Also, there is a big impact at the macro-economic level. It was already talked about this morning. But what does a country do when it doesn't produce enough of its food? It imports food for its people, and this impact at the macro-economic level really is impairing the country's ability to import food to continue feeding their people when their people are not being able to continue the production of this food.

We already saw the fast spread of the impact of HIV/AIDS. I just want to show you this slide that basically nobody is spared; nobody is spared. And you look at just the case of ..., just right there, just above South Africa, you see that in 1984 the prevalence rate was less than 1% and that today it has soared to over 36% of the adult population is HIV positive in ... Nobody would have believed that just 15 years ago. But this is the situation that we have to face today.

I'd like just for you to look at this picture for a moment. We have already been talking about changes in AIDS structures. In fact, at the household level we talked about a number of orphans, we talked about inability of households to find time to grow their own food. And just look at this picture for a moment. This is from ... What we see is a woman, a 65-year-old grandmother, who is there with six of her nine grandchildren, all of whose parents have died of HIV/AIDS. This is a situation, unfortunately, that is happening in many communities in the most affected countries. There is a whole generation that has been wiped out.

What does this mean for the future? What does this mean for that kind of medium-term or longer-term development that we were expecting to have at this time? I would just like to think about this little girl who is looking at us in this picture. The prospects of life are there for her. She has seen her father die, after that she has seen her mother die, and she has seen die also her uncles and her aunts, and probably some of her brothers and sisters and cousins are also going to die. What life prospect is there for this generation?

Just to end up, and I know I have minus one minute to do this, but I'd just like to outline a couple of the activities that we are undertaking at FAO. We have been for more than a decade producing studies on the impact of HIV/AIDS on rural development, agricultural farming systems and so on. And right now we are trying to launch an agriculture sector strategy to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS.

And I just want to make an observation here about. By mitigation we also believe that we are doing prevention. For example, if one of these orphans that we have been talking about has enough food in his or her little belly, these little person is not going to be needing to sell his or her body. And this is a situation that is happening in a lot of Africa. Widows and orphans are selling their bodies as the only means of subsistence. We believe that if we are able to provide food security, we are also not only mitigating the impact of the epidemic, but we're also preventing the further spread of this epidemic.

We are also collaborating with the CGIAR on an initiative that has been launched to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on both food and nutrition security. And I'd like to just mention that our dear Dr. Per Pinstrup-Andersen is one of the leaders of this initiative.

We are developing community-based, gender-sensitive participative methods for HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation. And here once again the issue of empowerment is absolutely crucial. We are looking at how we can preserve... systems. For example, regarding agricultural extension, genetic resources, how we can help communities develop methods of preserving their knowledge so that it is not eroded for the next generation. We are also looking at what we are doing regarding nutrition. We're making all of our emergency operations HIV/AIDS-sensitive. We're looking at more structural issues like access to land. If widows can be granted access to land by, say, other means than the customary law which normally excludes them from access to land, we think we are also contributing to prevention of the further spread of this epidemic.

All of our activities are obviously gender-sensitive. We are developing ways to monitor the impact of the epidemic on food and nutritional security. We are making all of our investments projects HIV/AIDS-sensitive, and we are developing new and proactive ways of sharing information among ourselves and with our partners and also with the people affected with the disease in Africa.

Thank you very much for your attention.