

Money, Mobility and vulnerability to HIV among ‘fish folks’ on Lake Victoria: Nurturing capabilities for alternative functioning’s

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By
Saidah Mbooge Najjuma
Department of Social Development
Faculty of Social Sciences
Ndejje University

Abstract

Lake Victoria is a habitat for immigrant and transient communities, originating from different areas of Uganda and beyond, mostly engaged in fishing activities as a source of income. People move from island to island following fish migratory movements and in anticipation of big fish catch for mega daily incomes. Since their livelihoods are not associated with settled, secure, and risk averse existence, HIV is more likely to spread (Edward and Janet, 2004; UAC, 2008; Camlin, Kwena & Dworkin, 2013; Diakonia, 2012). People’s vulnerability to HIV and AIDS is linked to their mobility and the careless nature of their lifestyles. Fish forks in this area lack the essential infrastructure such as health and education facilities, limiting the knowledge of their sero-status and subsequent management of HIV and AIDS. This paper applies the capability approach to HIV and AIDS by considering peoples vulnerability posed by mobility and search for money by adopting Nussbaum’s (2003; 2011) Central Capabilities framework for analysing the mitigation measures. Findings show that community based counselling, mentorship, recreation; entertainment and policy advocacy were mitigation measures that expanded Martha Nussbaum’s Central capabilities to improve the quality of life among fish forks living with HIV and AIDS. Alternative livelihoods that support the basic capabilities were team leadership, social accountability, cohesion, reflection- breaks, and identity building implemented by local people with assistance of external interveners. The outcomes of interventions were technical empowerment, recognition of indigenous knowledge, social capital, human diversity, and community literacy. Findings concur with Chambers (1980 & 1990s) and Freire (1970) who argue in favour of people’s ability to lead a meaningful life through their involvement in the problem solving process. The same understanding is found in the work of Alkile (2005) who uses the concept of ‘Agency’ to stresses the status of individuals as subjects rather than objects. The study recommends a pattern of interventions and policies that are inclusive and widen opportunities for the vulnerable people to share resources in a mutually reinforcing manner.

1.0 Introduction

HIV rates among fishing communities in Lake Victoria region have surpassed the HIV prevalence rate of 6.4 that has been cited as Uganda’s “success story” since the mid 1990’s (UNDP, 2005; UNAIDS, 2010; GOU, 2007; UAC, 2008; MOH, 2006). This field study conducted between 2007 and 2010 among fishing communities in partnership with Action Aid International, Kalangala reveals an HIV prevalence rate of 29%, known through HIV Counselling and Testing (AAIU Annual Report, 2007; The Weekly Observer, 2006). This is

not a representative figure though, since there are individuals who feel powerless to test for HIV and thus their status is not known, as remarked by this participant:

There are some people willing to test but they are scared about the results. They say, "I would rather live without knowing than have to worry and go without my meals. Why should I die from worry, or why would I die early? Going for an HIV test does not work. Leave me alone!" (Community intermediary)

This reluctance to take an HIV test means that more people either are diagnosed several years after they make up their mind to test or are never diagnosed which threatens management of the pandemic, as people without knowledge of their HIV and AIDS status may infect others inadvertently.

Lake Victoria a habitat of immigrants from different parts of Uganda and beyond (District Strategic Plan 2006/07-2010/11) is home to Kalangala Island district whose residents (70 percent) were from diverse ethnic communities. Movements of fish, which is their major source of livelihood, determine residents' transient behaviour. People tend to move back and forth on the islands in search of big fish catch for money. Immigration and transition makes Kalangala district a cosmopolitan society with little regard for a stable culture and no lasting values for meaningful life. The fluctuating livelihoods of fishing communities are not associated with settled, secure, and risk-averse existence, making HIV more likely to spread (UAC, 2008).

According to Edward and Janet (2004), people's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS infection stems from the complex nature of their lifestyles, their mobility, the time they spend away from homes and their access to daily income in the overall context of poverty. This is in addition to the readily available commercial sex workers at the fishing ports, increasing risks of HIV infection, as they indulge in precarious sexual activities. In this case, local people in partnership with their sponsor Action Aid international, Kalangala chose the capability to work collectively to alleviate human suffering among all irrespective of their infection status.

The paper examines the ability of the mitigation measures to secure the 10 capabilities in trying to improve the quality of life among fish folks who were exposed to HIV and AIDS. Mitigation interventions support functional capabilities that people have reasons to value, such as the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, and participate in political activities.

1.1. Objectives

- i) To establish vulnerability to HIV and AIDS among fish folks on Lake Victoria linked to money.
- ii) To establish vulnerability to HIV and AIDS among fish folks on Lake Victoria linked to mobility.
- iii) To analyse mitigation measures towards adverse effects of HIV and AIDS.
- iv) To explore capabilities for alternative livelihoods among fish folks on Lake Victoria.

2.0 Methodology

A case study design enabled an in-depth investigation of vulnerability to HIV and AIDS among fish folks resulting out of the quest for money and mobility. Data was gathered from men, women and children selected purposively, who participate in mitigating the adverse effects of HIV and AIDS, with support of Action AIDS International Kalangala. Participant observation was the major method supplemented with Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Participatory Rural Appraisal. In-depth Interviews were also administered to Key Informants. The data obtained about money, mobility, and vulnerability to HIV among 'fish folks' on lake Victoria, and their capabilities for alternative livelihoods was mainly qualitative. Data were analysed manually by employing Nussbaum's 10 central capabilities as the lenses to understand the mitigating interventions.

3.0 Findings

Findings show that *money* associated with inheritance of widows, induced defilement, and economic insecurity, daily incomes as well as *mobility* linked to trafficking of women, nomadic life styles, mobile prostitution and long distance boat driving make fish folks vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. These vulnerabilities result into different ways people suffer from HIV and AIDS such as pain, orphan hood, shame, loss of hope, isolation, self blame, loss of coping abilities, sickness, attrition, trauma, widowhood, division of families, loss of self esteem, poor livelihood, and irresponsibility, human indignity, stigma, distress and the most horrible is death. Given that such effects are impediments to the country's development, there is need for sustained interventions to expand people's valuable functioning to minimise their impacts. As Sen (1985) argues people living with HIV and AIDS would require more resources than those with normal illness, which follows that large amount of money, is needed to care for them to secure the capability of life, which calls for the understanding of such realities being experienced by fish folks in study areas.

3.1. Monetary vulnerability to HIV and AIDS

The concept of having money or lack of it leads to vulnerability to HIV and AIDS among fish folks on Lake Victoria. Money combines personal finance, investments, businesses, tools, stocks, savings, expenditure, and real estate available to those struggling to expand their quality of life. Fish folks vulnerabilities linked to money under the circumstances reported include widow inheritance, induced defilement, women's economic insecurity, daily incomes and money vs. condom:

3.1.1 Widow inheritance

Widow inheritance is an ancient practice in some African tribes, which currently pose high risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. The study revealed that the practice of widow inheritance was common among male in-laws who wanted to acquire property and wealth of the deceased. Results of focus group discussions for instance show that:

Because of home property, in-laws usually want to inherit widows, in order to grab their property once their brothers die. However, given that women are somewhat empowered, they can no longer chase them away, the way men used to do, since they fear litigation. Instead, in-laws decide to take them on (FGD, Betta village).

Widow inheritance was also a condition of the feeling that the payment of dowry, in order to marry, makes the widow another property to the family (community intermediary).

Although a desired practice, for the reasons of acquiring money, widow inheritance derails human functioning since it poses danger of acquiring or transmitting HIV. The human value of a woman seems to be eroded and classified as 'property', which can change hands from one man to another. Women are not something to deal with just mechanically, and it is contrary to existing laws.

3.1.2 Induced defilement

Responses revealed that greedy parents want to acquire property and quick money by marrying off their young daughters to older men. This was a recurrent problem in the discussions among communities reached in the study as reported in the following two scenarios:

In my village, there is a woman who had a young girl of thirteen years, very young, of this height (*demonstrating with her arm upwards*). These days, I have not been seeing the girl. When I asked the woman, she told me *that she had married the daughter off*. 'Dear, I handed over the girl to some man. I felt like, when I do that I would make her grow? (Community Intermediary)

Where I reside, the caretaker agreed with a man to marry the orphaned girl because he claimed not to have the money to pay for her fees. After negotiations, the caretaker asked for shillings 100,000/= (approximately 30 USD). You know among the fishermen that money can be made in a day. The man paid the money and took the girl of 12 years. He had intercourse with her for a period of six months and then returned her claiming that she did not know how to cook, how to behave in bed and how to participate in conversations among other reasons. When the girl came back in the family, she engaged in teaching sexual practices to the rest of the girls and boys (Community intermediary).

Participants' observations also revealed that a good number of married respondents were young which was suggesting that they were married off pre-maturely. Focus group discussions revealed that *boy children were enticed by "sugar mummies" who lure them with money for sex.*

In order to stem out the vice of this form of defilement, the government of Uganda identified cross-generational sex as fuelling the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Older people infect young people, which reflect a breakdown in the traditional concept of childcare that considered the upbringing of children a responsibility of every adult member of society. The findings correspond with a study conducted in Zimbabwe where every two out of three young women aged 17-24 reported that their most recent sexual partners were more than five years older and this was the case with all young Zimbabwean women in their first sexual experiences (UNAIDS, 2008). However, defilement, whether induced in early marriages, or not, it normally took place without the parties being tested which caused vulnerability to the pandemic. These findings support those of the (International Community of Women, 2009; Najjuma, 2006) that girls are the first to use their bodies sexually, to generate alternative sources of income and the first to be married off to relieve the household of the burden of feeding more people.

3.1.3 Women's economic insecurity

Fishing is the main livelihood on Lake Victoria and traditionally dominated by men. Based on this cultural stereotype, men pass on the fishing skills to male children, generation after generation. Thus, women who were mostly involved in the trade of fish, do not own the fishing boats. Men, who own such boats, demand for sex as a condition to sell fish to women, as it was expressed:

Although the fish will be bought, men still demand for sex in order to sell to us the fish (FGD Kaaya Landing Site).

Such trade demands make women vulnerable to HIV and AIDs as they struggle to become economically stable. The situation portrays power relations in sharing of economic resources and depicting women as sex objects. Interventions to address this challenge must aim at promoting change that empowers women to be active partners in human development. This reflects UAC (2004) study that showed the risk of infection as being fuelled by vulnerability and poverty of people, most especially women.

3.1.4 Daily Incomes

Contrary to the various reports that link HIV to poverty (UAC, 2006; MFPED, 2007), this study revealed that money accumulated by fish folks on a daily basis was a serious issue in exposing them to HIV and AIDS. The daily receipts of monies enticed men to purchase sex, knowing that they will get more money the next day as one of the participants noted:

They get a lot of money that is paid immediately after the catch; afterwards, they take a lot of alcohol. There is no work done from 8.00 am to 4.00 pm, when they are not fishing apart from relaxing with women (DHI Kalangala).

Fish folks live by the day, which affirms the Ganda saying; |ensimbi ozirya ng'Omuwubi|, which translates that; *'you use money extravagantly as a fishmonger'*. This is the acquisition of money for the sake of accumulating it not for human functioning. It means that daily incomes can be of use to fish folks if they can improve their quality of life. The situation is exacerbated by the idle seasons of the lake (enjako¹), where men engage in sexual relationships most of the time. In addition, the unpredictable turbulence on the lake tempts fish folks to compare Lake Phobia with HIV and AIDS. They explained that,

Lake Phobia makes us to fear the lake more than HIV and AIDS. When one survives the unpredictable turbulence of the lake for a night, this achievement must be celebrated by having sex. After all we have the money. With HIV, one can live for another year, but, with the roughness of waters during the night, someone will die instantly! (FGD Semawundo Landing site; Community Intermediary)

Worse among these is the lack of skills to plan for the daily incomes as one of them said;

The daily fish catch; create a source of regular income for the fishmongers resulting into accumulation of money that is often unplanned for (FGD, Kakyanga landing site).

¹ A period when there is neither moonlight nor darkness and there are no fishing activities to keep men busy in the fishing job.

Jeffery (2008) also reports on a gradual rise in HIV infection with wealth increase in Uganda. Overall, exposure to HIV and AIDS is not necessarily for the poor Ugandans, but even among those with economic standing.

3.1.5 Money versus Condom Use

Fishing communities have a belief that fishing for wealth creation is opposed to condom use. They mentioned that when one used a condom and went fishing, one was unlikely to catch fish, as they explained:

When you use a condom during sex, that night, you cannot catch a single fish.
(FGD Semawundo Landing Site)

Imagine the reckless lifestyle of fish folks combined with the non-use of condom, which was likely to hinder the capability to life by aggravating vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Another respondent who claimed the status of a private nurse on one of the islands concurred that;

Even when you give them (men) condoms for free, the easiest way to know that they have not used them, check on the pathways to the lake” (Study participant, Kakyanga Island)

It shows that even when fish folks knew the consequences of non-use of condoms they lacked the moral ability to protect themselves from HIV because of search for money. This compares with having knowledge of HIV and AIDS pandemic that is of little use to fish folks when it is not combined with the value towards the capability of life. Overall, the use of condoms, which is an approved protective measure of HIV and AIDS among populations globally, seems to be hampered by economics, which underlines the urgency to demystify the stereotyped beliefs about condoms among the fishing communities, given their indulgent behaviour.

3.2. Mobility vulnerabilities to HIV and AIDS

Mobility in this case is defined as the movement of individuals from place to place to expand economic opportunities. It encompasses transition from one island to another in anticipation of bumper fish harvests, which was likely to expose fish folks to HIV and AIDS. The key elements in nomadic life style of fishing communities include, trafficking of women, mobile prostitution and long distance boat drivers that are discussed under this section.

3.2.1 Nomadic life styles

Nomadic life style of fishing communities as a livelihood capability exposes them to HIV and AIDs. Fishmongers follow the fish movements, within the islands and the Lake. As people move back and forth, they are likely to create new sexual encounters, as exemplified below:

We have several landing sites. Migrants who come from elsewhere, switch from one landing site to another. They do fishing activities in the night; in the day, they have nothing to do, only to drink, and to have women (Community Intermediary).

Kalangala is a cosmopolitan area, where entry and exit is free. Accordingly, very many people come to Kalangala in disgrace, and some are widows already. (District Health Inspector, Kalangala)

Many people come for various opportunities, especially to do business in fishing, and timber but when they reach Kalangala, their lifestyles change. (Programme officer Action Aid Kalangala)

It is therefore evident that immigration coupled with transition was contributing enormously to exposure to HIV and AIDS among study communities. Since 70 percent of the residents in Kalangala are from diverse locations, their nomadic lifestyles posed a challenge of the escalating HIV and AIDS.

3.2.2 Trafficking of Women by bar owners

The study revealed that although there are fewer women residing at the islands, many of them are trafficked by bar owners to sell for them alcohol. They moreover sell beer for free but also satisfy bar owner's customers sexually on payment as respondents narrated below:

The bar owners bring with them beautiful girls from elsewhere to help in selling of alcohol. The tradition is that, they sell beer for no pay, as they also attract their own customers for trade in sex. Those who have stayed long cannot easily attract customers, thus the exchange of women from island to island. (FGD Semawundo Landing Site)

The '*beer girls*' are usually in transition and are likely to acquire or carry the virus in the subsequent sexual encounters which increases vulnerability to HIV and AIDS in the district and elsewhere. Further, people on the islands live close to one another in barracks (*Enkambi* in figure 1) style settlements and the homes used as bars for selling alcohol are also used as lodges in sex trade.



Figure 1: Nature of the Residences

Landing sites are almost like trading centres, *closed* and are so busy. They do fishing only in the night and relax during the day. Everybody is seeing each other repeatedly in the same place. As a matter of looking for what to do during the day, they resort to sex. (Secretary for Health, Kalangala District)

3.2.3 Mobile Prostitution

Prostitution² intensifies on landing sites in seasons of big fish harvest. The nature of their job necessitates them to have several partners and are thus at risk of being infected with HIV, or passing on the virus to subsequent partners (UAC, 2007; MOH, 2006).

The prostitutes keep loitering all over the '*enkambi*' – landing site, dressed in trousers, until when they find anyone to engage them. A prostitute may also sit in a local bar; take one beer for an hour, until she gets someone to talk to her (FGD Kakyanga).

To estimate the danger this caused in study communities, one study participant who identified herself as a private health practitioner on Kakyanga Island pointed out that:

This time round, it was a complex swelling ailment under people's private parts. First, one man came into my clinic and I could not establish what it was exactly, but I carried out a minor surgery. The next time, another one came, then others, and many of them! Moreover, each individual attended to was questioning the initial point of infection. We earned money out of this confusion, which might have been caused by only one *woman* (FGD participant Kakyanga).

This is an indication that each client might have multiple sexual partners and could not trace the origin of the infection. Besides, each client was potentially at a high risk of acquiring the HIV and AIDS infection. This is evident of the complexity of the HIV and AIDS problem among the fishing communities. Even with the celebrated success of reduction in prevalence

² Refers to women who offer sex for economic gain (Stuttaford, Harrington & Lewando-Hundt, 2008).

rates in Uganda, one person can still infect a big number of people, making it an obstacle to prevent further spread of HIV and AIDS. Causal factors of prostitution include:

Socialisation: This upholds the dependency of women on men who meet their basic needs, as well as the shrinking employment opportunities for women who have been thrown out of the fish selling business because of the high demand for fish by the fish processors (AAIU, 2007).

Fewer numbers of women:

Women are few³ and are in categories; those in fishing business, those who lost their husbands and those who are looking for money, all come to the islands. Therefore, sharing women by men is a normal practice in the area. Women whose husbands are not around and men, whose wives are not around, are likely to engage in prostitution. (FGD, Kakyanga Island).

This population is unique; there are more men compared to women. One woman services close to six men and they might all be aware! (community intermediary)

It is clear though that prostitutes are among the most-at-risk populations identified by the Government of Uganda (UAC, 2007; MOH, 2006). Prostitution has a negative impact to human development that relates to the total life of a person's functioning.

3.2.4 Long distance boat drivers (coxswains)

Long distance boat driving is a means and an end concerning exposure to HIV and AIDS. Boat drivers transport and engage prostitutes across islands, by dropping some and picking others as emphasised by the remarks;

Men who go for fishing will get these prostitutes for convenience. Prostitutes move from one island to another doing the same job. The coxswains will ferry them for free to wherever they want to go. Prostitutes do not spend more than two days on an island, they move as they have stopovers, until when they disappear. They are all sick. If one can charge 'live sex' Uganda Shs 10,000/= approximately (USD 3), and 'Condom⁴' Uganda Shs 5000/= approximately (USD 1.5) how safe is this person? (Community intermediary, Kalangala District)

Overall, these findings show a clear reflection of issues of Money, Mobility and vulnerability to HIV among 'fish forks' on Lake Victoria. These vulnerabilities greatly contribute to the escalating HIV and AIDS scourge that result into loss of hope, shame, trauma and indignity as shown earlier, which was a concern for human security. Important to note is that people

³ Population for the whole district is 36661; 22,313 are males and 14,348 are females: 2002 Population and Housing Census.

⁴ Live means unprotected sex and condom means protected sex.

who are not infected with HIV and AIDS are affected indirectly, since an environment shadowed by human pain threatens their wellbeing. Thus, understanding these sufferings due to money and mobility helps to appreciate the experiences fish folks go through to pursue mitigation measures in collaboration with external interveners like Action Aid, Kalangala to contribute to human development.

Sen (2005) asserts that part of the richness of the capabilities approach is its insistence on the need for open valuational scrutiny for making social judgments. He further argues that the task of weighing various capabilities should be a consideration of each society based on public reasoning. Thus, the adoption of Nussbaum's Central capabilities supports the understanding of how mitigation measures are improving the quality of life among fish folks on Lake Victoria. Anard et al (2009) also draws heavily on Nussbaum's list of capabilities as a relatively comprehensive high level account of the spaces in which human wellbeing or life quality is experienced. It is for the above reason that this study uses Nussbaum's Central Capabilities to assess the mitigation measures aimed at improving the wellbeing of fish folks affected by HIV and AIDS.

4.0 Mitigation Measures as Capability enhancers

Local communities in partnership with external interveners after a collective understanding of these realities, invested considerable resources such as time and emotions by collectively undertaking a range of mitigating activities to liberate fish folks from the effects of HIV and AIDS while contributing towards enlargement of human ability to do and to be. Further, interventions took care of the heterogeneity of the population, by considering relevant personal characteristics among other factors and the multidimensional nature of HIV and AIDS. Intervenors promote a community dialogue approach to ensure integration of voices and capabilities with an aim to re-humanise people living with HIV and AIDS. Nussbaum's (2009) list of capabilities entail; life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play and control over one's environment that are expounded in the context of HIV and AIDAS mitigation.

The capability of *life* for instance was promoted through caring for the orphans and vulnerable children, widows and the sick by implementing Home Based Health Care Counselling (HBHCC), HIV Counselling, routine counselling, visiting the vulnerable households and referrals for treatment of opportunistic infections to support communities live the life they value and have reasons to value. More still, participant observation and

interviews with study participants revealed that they immunised and monitored the growth of their children infected and affected with HIV and AIDS to promote their capability of life as they explained;

When the child is sick, he/she is usually neglected, people think that they are going to die soon. To improve the health of children, we invite health workers to carry out growth monitoring, immunization and de-worming and provide skills to care givers in proper handling of the orphans and vulnerable children. This is because caregivers carry on these responsibilities on a daily basis.

It was therefore necessary through some initiatives that people infected with HIV and AIDS are saved from dying prematurely, and that their life is improved.

The capability of *bodily health* was expanded by building housing for the affected people and by means of coordinating food supplements such as; maize flour, and sugar but at the same time equipping people suffering from HIV and AIDS with appropriate agricultural practical skills. This was in addition to the supply of other basic needs like medication, and soap, as well as mosquito nets to people affected with HIV and AIDS. Through community efforts and often with support of external sponsors and government, these interventions were possible to enable people have good health.

The capability of *bodily integrity* was ensured through teaching morals, and mentoring of children and adults regarding their sexual and other reproductive rights. This revealing experience of my respondent illustrates the fact that she was able to secure children's right against defilement when she confronted the culprit who re-located.

One evening at around 7 pm, I met a girl, who was heading fast in the opposite direction and I asked where she was going. She told me that Mr Til had asked her to join him in the evening so that he could touch her breasts to grow! 'The first time he met Allen and me when we were from fetching water he asked whether we wanted our breasts to grow which is an idea that we desired. He told us to bring to him our breasts every evening such that he touches them to grow fast. He has so far touched Allen's and mine three times. Today, he suggested I meet him this time, near the lake'. I took the girl with me, had counselling session with both girls the next day. Thereafter, I went and confronted the man, face-to-face (anger), and warned him about his bad conduct. He has now migrated to another site (Community facilitator).

Being able to secure two children against violent sexual assault and helping to dislocate the culprit from the island, may have saved many more children from exposure to sexual assault

and the possibly for HIV infection among the girls, was a very important step in securing the capability of bodily integrity.

The capability of *emotions* seem to have been nurtured when community members formed reading groups that were responsible for visiting the sick and bed-ridden patients to read for them short stories, books and recite poems in order to show them care and love. This practice was found to be very helpful in reassuring people's feelings, emotional health, and relieving the trauma associated with HIV and AIDS, which was another form of human association that was crucial in supporting human growth expounded by Nussbaum.

Participant observations showed that communities supported the capability to *play* when they developed recreation grounds and community centres for the adults to interact with orphans and vulnerable children. This involved socialising orphan and vulnerable children as shown in figures 2 and 3.



Figure 2: The OVC at Lulamba Island learning the skills of socialising with their mentor



Figure 3: Community Members Playing with Vulnerable Children at the Centre

These swings, ladders and boat shaped structures, are constructed, and used by the community to support the capability to play as they explain;

Because we deal with OVC who are affected by HIV and AIDS, when they come here, it should be a place of joy. Interactions in these places involve dialogues that enrich the psychosocial support to children and build their minds. The community in this case, acts as an HIV and AIDS Support Group (community facilitator).

The capability of *affiliation* was expanded through construction of shelter as meeting places for the affected people and their sponsors to share insights. This was necessary for protecting

the freedom of assembly and speech. It also encompassed mobilisation of school fees for the AIDS orphans in order to keep them in school such that they are able to interact with others.

The capability of *other species* was enhanced in the proper use of local materials such as papyrus to design in-house messages with important HIV and AIDS mitigation messages. Study participants were also able to protect public good, such as forests by limiting the use of wood fuel in cooking. For instance, one study participant who invited me to her home had constructed a modern wood fuel saving stove that was meant to save energy as a mitigation measure to save human energy and protect other species. She mentioned that;

The time and energy we save is spent in generating other opportunities for the wellbeing of our families. The stove shall be replicated in the neighbourhoods according to the community plan (study participant, Kalangala).

This was necessary for preserving human energy that was contributing towards the capability of life and bodily health.

The capability of *senses, imagination, and thought* was expanded through composition of songs and poems with messages imagining a world without HIV and AIDS. Participants reported to have engaged in self-awareness and self-mobilisation for HIV and AIDS testing in collaboration with external sponsors. Results of participant observation at Kaaya landing site, for example, revealed that study communities mobilised themselves, registered⁵ through their community facilitators, and invited the district teams to provide the HCT services. The counsellor reminded them to champion positive⁶ living and to seek services as couples. Other interventions involved publishing articles in newsletters as a way of introducing awareness regarding management of HIV and AIDS. For example, their sponsor Action Aid International – Uganda, co-sponsored a local Community Based Organisation at Bufumira Island to coordinate the production of a news letter ‘*Ekitangaala kya Kalangala*’, literary ‘the light of Kalangala’ with an aim of supporting people with HIV and AIDS, share their imagination, thoughts and experiences.

The capability to *control of one’s environment* was enabled through policy advocacy, the means by which systems, laws, and policies that negatively affect labelled groups are challenged and changed. Study participants organised symposiums to share inspirations and

⁵ Registration complies with the requirement for clients knowledge and consent provided for under the Uganda National Policy Guidelines for HIV Counselling and Testing (2005) Page 7

⁶ Avoid passing on HIV to others and observing self-discipline depending on the results.

opportunities with others in similar work. They discussed particular aspects of HIV and AIDS policies concerning mitigation, identified gaps, and planned strategies to influence change. Individuals in islands infected with HIV and AIDS without access to medication formed a post-test club with an aim of supporting one another to have access. This was the case with Buyange Post Test Club (PTC) at Kyamuswa as explained that;

During earlier days People Living With HIV and AIDS received septrine from the Sub County Health Centre III, which was too costly. Through advocacy and dialogue with the health service providers, they demanded for services to reach their community. “Now days, the doctor delivers septrine to them every Wednesday and the PWHA clubs are considered for supply in the Sub Country strategic plans (Community Intermediary, Kyamuswa).

Engagement in policy advocacy empowered communities to rediscover themselves in the face of HIV and AIDS, with a rights based approach. This built confidence among those who engaged in policy advocacy to demand for what is justly theirs. This enabled them to participate effectively in choices that govern their lives and exercised reason in terms of accessibility to the relevant services. It follows that advocacy was valuable for securing the rights of the people affected and infected with HIV and AIDS.

The capability of *practical reason* was enhanced by organising reflection breaks that allowed experiential learning and review of existing mitigating activities jointly undertaken by the people facing daily HIV and AIDS realities in partnership with those extending help. During this period, which usually took a week, it was possible for participants to reflect on the individual and collective accomplishments as per their plans and to inform the next steps. Expanding this capability that entails the liberty of conscience and religious observance according to Nussbaum, participants engaged several dialogue strategies as they expounded;

We use several approaches to share messages as individuals and at a community level. We employ tools such as a lifeline and time trends to determine progress on the plan or still, as a community, we may also prepare short plays, short stories or engage ourselves in a lot of discussions and presentations that make sharing happen. (Study participant)

The ability of stakeholders to reflect on their work in community dialogues was an important form of human development that would keep them together and had a positive implication to collective mitigation of the HIV and AIDS effects. The process involved reflection on their experiences to inform their plans and change the way they live. Therefore Nussbaum’s list of capabilities used here as a framework to analyse HIV and AIDS mitigation measures was

helpful for understanding mitigation strategies employed by fish folks in partnership with their sponsors like AAIU Kalangala to improve their wellbeing. These are linked to collective capabilities described in the next section.

5.0 Nurturing capabilities

The capability approach considers freedoms in relation to what a person values and has reasons to value which supports valuable functioning among fish folks facing the brutal realities of HIV and AIDS already discussed in previous sections. Nurturing these capabilities among fish folks to lead the life they value and have reasons to value involved faithful use of these practice values with support of their sponsor, Action Aid, Kalangala.

Team leadership

The more effective the leadership, the more capacity the community has (Bartle, 1998). Study communities agreed and practiced a rotational leadership that allowed all to head the team a point in the process of service delivery. By this they agreed on specified periods, which allowed transparency and democratization of role performance. This way of working provided confidence for people to feel that their contributions count. The process was also likely to promote responsible interactions without engendering conflicts. Furthermore, each individuals involved in HIV and AIDS mitigation at community level took the responsibility of reminding one another of the dates and time for all community events, which they considered an obligation that had become a culture for enhancing collective mitigation of the HIV and AIDS effects. This also created empathy that depicted ownership of the problem faced and of the need for collective action to improve their quality of life.

Social Accountability

Accountability refers to the question of who has the right and power to ask questions, to demand answers, and evoke sanctions regarding the quality, effectiveness, and relevance of a given practice and the methods of delivery (Lee, 1986). All participants in the study communities assumed social accountability as one way to support transparency in human development. Study participants reported everyone was expected to have had a big influence and responsibility in shaping the personal growth of other community members involved in HIV and AIDS mitigation related activities. This allowed the fundamental importance of freedom to speak about the good and bad since they had built the confidence to do so. Participants told me that, if someone identified something wrong, she/he was required to share it immediately with the concerned individual in order to generate a collective possible alternative solution, which furthered positive relations in collective HIV and AIDS

mitigation. They also reported timely response whenever they were expected to meet, while those unable to show up sent an apology note or delegated, where possible. It is therefore clear that the practice of social accountability promoted constructive criticism as a value, which was also a good strategy for fostering the central capabilities of emotion, affiliation among others for effective HIV and AIDs mitigation.

Building Cohesion

As already noted, the study respondents constituted transient communities a means of survival, although it was challenging as they narrated;

Transition has been a big challenge and still it is. If you looked into the attendance reports of community meetings, participation varies from period to period. In periods when communities are settled, attendance is high. The problem of transition is very difficult to handle in communities since transition fulfils people's livelihoods. We cannot limit their movements, because these people move with a purpose (Community Intermediary, Lulamba).

Considering the movements of the people on the islands where people are not permanently settled, we have been facing challenges. For example, fish folks may develop an action point such as a meeting point to seat them during community dialogues, which would also act as a learning centre and together we allocate the resources to implement it, according to their budgets. However, before they utilise the shelter, they move, they may come back or not, you can get there after a period of six months, when indeed they went long ago. Addressing this problem depends on where people go! (District Initiative Coordinator, AAIU, Kalangala).

Most responses during data collection unveiled transition as a challenge that made stakeholders to engender innovations, in form of action points to build cohesion and supported by their sponsor -AAIU Kalangala, as it was explained:

Initially people were living a nomadic sort of lifestyle for which we could not find an immediate solution. However, we are encouraging them to come up with action points that help them to stay in their homes and it is working (Community Intermediary, Lulamba).

Further, one of the innovations was the diversification of people's livelihoods, which called for settlements as they shared:

AAU adopted a monitoring and evaluation system that promotes self-assessment, innovation, flexibility, reflection, and action learning. We generally employ the Reflection- Action cycle (Figure 5). It is based on people sitting, dialoguing and agreeing on what would be the indicators of their intervention, who is going to be involved, the frequency by which this would be done, which we all together look for when doing the monitoring of mitigating interventions. At the time of reflection, communities are able to establish what the achievements are, and what has not been achieved, based on the indicators developed by the community

themselves. If not achieved, then ask themselves what went wrong? They therefore use that information to improve. In community dialogue, we discussed the implications of transition and agreed on other means of improving this practice. We have come up with innovations in the way we carry out our activities with communities which make people to be permanent residents. For example, people have taken on projects of rearing animals like goats, pigs, besides growing bananas as a transformative way into a new and better lifestyle (District Initiative Coordinator AAIU, Kalangala).

The Action-Reflection cycle in Figure 5 assumes ongoing communication among people being supported and those extending help to reflect on prevailing situation to consider interventions for active participation of both parties in mitigating HIV and AIDS effects.

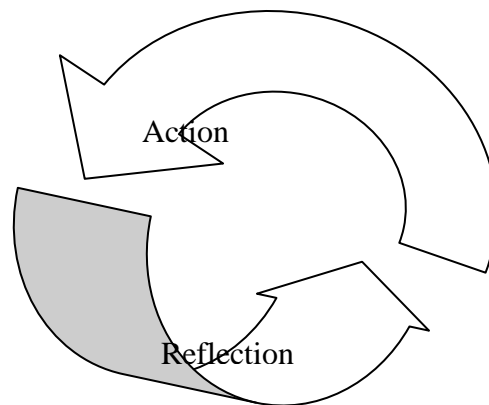


Figure 5: Action- Reflection Cycle used in collective problem solving process

Social Audits

Social audits also referred to as “Triangulation exercises” by the community and its external sponsors were executed to ensure that finances invested in HIV and AIDS mitigation matched the implemented activities. Social audits entailed detailed scrutiny of the policies and procedures followed by the community groups in mitigating adverse effects of HIV and AIDS. Participant observations of social auditing processes and in-depth interviews with key informants indicate that social audits involved assessment of actual performance against agreed work plan, following up on recommendations made in previous plans, identification of gaps to inform the next programming and assessment of activities in relation to the visionary focus of mitigating HIV and AIDS. It also entailed documentation of the work done and leave it on record while laying strategies for the next planning period. Jutta and Quintanar (2000) suggest that the guiding principles of social auditing are inclusiveness, completeness, comparability, continuous improvement, regularity, external verification, and disclosure.

Participant observations provided a fast field insight into social auditing activities sought jointly by people receiving support and those extending help to monitor and evaluate the performances in the quest of value for money. This committed those involved to share the skills and experiences to assure team spirit for collaborative mitigation of the adverse effects of HIV and AIDS. Social auditing ensures accountability beyond the sheer indicator definition and it fosters learning within an organisation from the processes of constructive and analytical joint evaluation (Jutta and Quintanar, 2000).

Exchange and Cross Visits

Exchange and Cross-visits entailed learning through exposure to successful HIV and AIDS mitigation interventions within or outside the community. Study participants called this ‘positive deviance’⁷. The successful teams were used as models by external interveners in promoting innovations and improvement of existing programmes. For example, at the time of field visits, teams supported by Action Aid visited Bundibujjo and Mityana - West and Central parts of Uganda respectively. This enabled participants in HIV and AIDS mitigation to appreciate the multiple faces of HIV and AIDS reality by recognising other people’s viewpoints, frames, and judgments. The assumption was that each person with a fixed position would be able to alter it through the exposure to other initiatives. This has been echoed by Sen that;

We can never survey our own sentiments and motives; we can never form any judgement concerning them, unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them (Sen, 2005: 161)

Exposures also helped to expand the participants’ knowledge and experiences besides bridging the information gaps regarding measures of mitigating HIV and AIDS. Given that the basic objective of human development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long, healthy, and creative lives, these interventions are necessary as a means of expanding individual and group capabilities conceptualised as a reflection of the freedom to achieve valuable functioning (Alkire 2008). These capabilities to a great extent address issues of equality, participation, creativity and rights that address deficiencies in fishing communities as well as the strategies that attempt to mitigate them. For instance, functioning, such as enhancement of people’s coping mechanisms, assurance of people’s self-esteem and

⁷ In this research, Positive Deviance means exposure of the successful groups or other actors in order to learn from them. In other words, successful groups are used as showcases to help others learn and improve.

human dignity, promotion of peoples' livelihoods, reduction of self-blame, promotion of empowered participation among local fish folks and support towards people's livelihoods. This was in addition to supporting people without shame, promotion of HIV and AIDS knowledge sharing and promotion of respect for human rights of people living with HIV and AIDS were reported to have upheld a very important capability of life.

6.0 Emerging Valuable Functioning's among fish folks

The use of Nussbaum's central capabilities to analysis of mitigation measures shows the ability to turn HIV and AIDS effects into special indicators to consider when evaluating human development in the context of HIV and AIDS and to determine measures that can help vulnerable fish folks experiencing HIV and AIDs effects to improve their wellbeing. This in turn translates into alternative human functionings discussed under this section.

Technical Empowerment: There was evidence of technical empowerment among the people reached by the study. It entailed gaining the ability, confidence, and competencies to identify mitigating effects based on the skills acquired through practice and mentorship from external interveners. This is different from political empowerment that raises questions about being opinionated. On this, one of the participants at Kaaya landing site made it clear that they were for HIV and AIDS, not for politicking. Technical empowerment was realised through training people living with HIV and AIDS as community counsellors and creating and opportunity to share their experiences as participants explained:

Government with assistance of its development partners has trained positive living persons as counsellors. Many of them work with medical staff, in providing services at the ART clinic. "Because, they are using the ARVs, they know how it impacts and always share their experiences of using the drugs. They are centred at the district and are paid (District Medical Officer, Kalangala).

Some communities have trained their own people to implement care and support services to people infected with HIV and AIDS. The communities have also facilitated the formation of post-test clubs to promote collective voices for advocacy (Community Intermediary, Kalangala).

It is worth noting that millions of dollars and a considerable amount of staff time can be saved when local people's capacities and competencies are developed to enable them take on most of the mitigation interventions with little assistance from external interveners.

Indigenous voices registered in problem solving: Supporting local communities to turn their decisions about their wellbeing into reality cemented a strong relationship among them,

their elected representatives to Parliament, and the external sponsors. For instance, in the presence of the researcher, a Hon Member of Parliament addressed study communities who he considered as important constituency to understand what was going on in the 'HOUSE'. He orientated them on how they were likely to be affected by some policies that might be debated without the 'poor' in mind, which was also necessary for him to gather their views as he stated:

What you do here at the grassroots and what we share with you gives us the strength to debate in parliament. People sit and discuss community challenges and forward them to policy makers, because they have the capacity to do it. This is why I am grateful to institutions like Action Aid, that use empowerment tools to give the community the confidence to dialogue and forward their ideas to duty bearers using rights based approach (Hon. Member of Parliament, Kalangala).

Citing examples, he compared the approaches that promoted dialogue, to periods when the government used to plan on behalf of the people. '*This promoted a people's feeling that the government owned the assets distributed to them, and people did not have any role in promoting sustainability of such assets.*' he commented. In addition, local communities viewed their relationship with those that are extending support in terms of the following:

Generally, we are partners. We live a symbiotic kind of life, AAIU supports us, but it also has a mission for its presence in Kalangala, which is fulfilled when we work together. Where communities are not, there is no job, I cannot say it is a Father-Son relationship, but we depend on each other. We do not have any difference with our partners; we sit on a round table to talk about community issues, when we are here as a community they also participate in some of community activities. What is important is meeting the objective of our partnership (Community intermediary).

This shows liberation on the part of local fish folks from dependency on external interveners, which symbolises the true meaning of human development promoted by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1990).

Confidence to speak boldly on stigma associated with HIV and AIDS; Study communities demystified HIV and AIDS from being an unmentionable issue to a subject of daily discussions, which helped to contain stigma in study areas, and promoted change of attitudes and support towards the capability of life as they explained;

We have realised change of attitude. When one talks about HIV and AIDS, people welcome the idea. For example, through Community-Based Volunteers at the village level, each is in charge of 10 households to help fight stigma. People do register for testing voluntarily. This shows that they have a positive attitude and confidence (Secretary for Health, Kalangala).

The other strategy of containing stigma was that of working closely with positive living people and technocrats to alleviate the effects of HIV and AIDS, through open communication about the impacts of HIV and AIDS as they explained.

We brought on board People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWAs), they have their leadership and are well organised. We ensure that they are involved in all activities aimed at mitigating the effects of HIV and AIDS in Kalangala district. They can give a clear message to help others test for HIV, they know what to eat and can guide those who qualify to access Antiretroviral treatment (Secretary for Health, Kalangala).

Underlying this was friendship that embedded in the provision of services without an element of stigma. Thus increasingly more people were willing to be tested, and many tested for HIV and AIDS, which and steered the establishment of post-test clubs for mutual support. One of the interesting and notable achievements was that a chairperson on one of the villages became a member of the HIV and AIDS support group after an HIV counselling and testing session. Controlling stigma further contributed to owning the HIV and AIDS problem among the people as they recounted that:

At first, people demanded for HIV Counselling and testing (HCT). Then the medical staff went to test them, after testing, they would ask; “now you tested us, what have you done? Where do we get the medicine? You would have left us alone”. However, when they understood how and where to get the services through their dialogue meetings, many came up to express their wide requests for HCT. They no longer ask for treatment, but ask for testing, they demand for it, and want the results immediately, because they know where and how to get the treatment. At the islands, such people have the money; money is not a problem, what they need is the accessibility to ARVs. Some circles⁸ for example, Kitobo, and Serinya made linkages with Mildmay-Uganda, the institution rents for them a house on specific days, transports them and feeds them when they go to get the services. (Community Intermediary, Kalangala)

Participant observations during field visits showed that because of efforts to reduce stigma, many community members gained the requisite courage and mustered the necessary confidence to speak out boldly about stigma, which cultivated changes in behaviour. Results show that this helped to minimise blame, fostered positive self-image among the infected,

⁸ Circle is a local name for a group. They are relaxed environments that help people to build confidence in dealing with group situations. The method aims to promote active dialogue and empowerment, which is out of Freire’s method. Participants take ownership on issues that come up and are more likely to be moved to take local action, change their behaviour or attitudes (Archer and Cottingham, 1996). In circles, we find themes and limit situations that share historical similarities (Freire, 1970).

many of whom decided to enlist for ARV's. They reported increased demand for the training in HIV and AIDS psychosocial support skills to enable them expand the capability of life.

Social Capital: Findings show evidence of social capital⁹ that was essential in many ways for meeting the needs of study communities. For example, communities sponsored the sick with transport to access the drugs and boosted self-help among neighbourhoods as participants reported that:

We have mobilised ten thousand Uganda shillings for each person living with HIV and AIDS as part of our voluntary obligation. This money is used whenever she/he has to go to The AIDS Support organisation (TASO) Entebbe. This is very taxing, "but we do it". (FGD, Kakyanga Island)

It is important to note here that as actors in HIV and AIDS response, there are diverse experiences, values, reasoning, exposure, and personal stories combined in collective action. Therefore, despite the diversity, fish folks were united with a common denominator of mitigating the adverse effects of HIV and AIDS, which demonstrated social capital and the development of human agency as a process of collective action.

7.0. Conclusions and Recommendations

Mobility among fish folks as they aspire for money on Lake Victoria makes individuals, household, and the community vulnerability to HIV, leading to economical, emotional, and social sufferings. The situation that breeds learning experiences among local people in partnership with external sponsoring agency to facilitate change they have reasons to value, nurtured in a range of mitigating interventions. This understanding goes back to the works of renowned social critiques such as Chambers (1980 & 90s) and Friere (1970) who argue in favour of people's ability to lead a meaningful life through their involvement. The same understanding is found in the work of Alkile (2005) who uses the concept of 'Agency' that stresses the status of individuals as subjects rather than objects.

Since mobility escalates HIV and AIDS among fish folks, it is imperative to put in place policies that govern safe use of Lake Resources. These may include such policies that allow fishing from one point, such as cage fishing and those that allow diversification of livelihood opportunities among fish folks to reduce on the level of mobility. This calls for widening of

⁹ It includes friendship, mutual support, networks, respect, solidarity and social cohesion and even the glue that binds society together (Putnam, 1993)

opportunities among fish folks by mainstream programs for skilling them to invest their money in other productive assets and to plan for alternative livelihoods.

Given the complex nature of HIV and AIDS among fishing communities, Nussbaum's central capabilities cannot be expanded as isolated entities. Each of the capabilities has a direct influence on the other but with a central project to expand the capability of life and subsequently the wellbeing of fish folks. Therefore, each capability needs to be explored among fish folks in practical terms beyond the level of a framework for analysis of mitigation interventions.

Capabilities, such as, team leadership, social accountability, social auditing, and cohesion, allowed interactions that were valuable to secure the central capabilities effectively. There is need for valuable practice interventions among those suffering and those extending the support to plan for valuable functioning's. This is in addition to supporting vulnerable groups to enable them accumulate collective agency towards mitigating the adverse effects of HIV and AIDS to enhance human functioning.

Valuable functioning's arising out of nurturing basic capabilities, were technical empowerment, recognition of indigenous voices in HIV and AIDS problem solving, social capital and self-esteem, which would otherwise have been deprived if HIV and AIDS mitigation measures were not put in place. In other words, these functioning are the reasons for the capabilities that have been discussed and they need to be promoted in studies among fish folks and other vulnerable groups.

Finally there is need to promote mitigation interventions that nurture capabilities of vulnerable people such as fish folks to participate in improving their quality of life conditions. In this case Nussbaum's central capabilities are only helpful in understanding how to expand the quality of life among fish folks through collective agency that allow sharing the resources in a mutually reinforcing manner.

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