Food insecurity linked with HIV/AIDS in Africa

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Determining how the HIV/AIDS epidemic increases food insecurity in African cities – and what can be done to reduce the chances of this happening –is the focus of a new, international Queen's-led project.

Both Canadian and Southern African expertise will be used in developing new training programs and in policy advocacy around this crucial issue.

Funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the $3-million, five-year project is headed by Global Development Studies professor Jonathan Crush, who is director of the university's Southern African Research Centre. Queen's was one of four successful applicants in the recent CIDA-funded Tier One University Partners in Cooperation and Development competition.

"It is heartening to see support directed to such worthwhile causes that will enhance the ability of South African educational organizations to address regional needs, and ultimately improve the quality of life for those in the region," says Vice-Principal (Research) Kerry Rowe. "We are extremely proud that researchers at Queen's are securing the financial support required to lead the way on these collaborative projects."

Until now associated mainly with rural areas, food security is rapidly becoming a critical urban development issue in a region currently experiencing unprecedented urbanization and the highest rates of

HIV/AIDS in the world, notes Dr. Crush. The new project aims to establish a sustainable African centre of excellence in urban food security at the University of Cape Town, including a network of organizations committed to enhanced food security for the urban poor and HIV/AIDS-affected households.

The researchers will look at the relationship between food supply, access and distribution amongst the urban poor in 11 African cities. A key research question will be how the HIV/AIDS epidemic increases food insecurity and what policy measures might be adopted to reduce vulnerability to both.

"The impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on urban livelihoods and food production, distribution and access has been catastrophic," says Dr Crush. "By focusing local and international attention on this critical development challenge and building local capacity to manage food insecurity in African cities, Queen's is helping to play an important role in rolling back some of the worst aspects of the pandemic."

The project will work with universities in eight African countries (with University of Cape Town as the lead African partner), several major NGOs including Care International and two regional networks of municipal officials: the South African Cities Network and the Municipal Development Partnership of Eastern and Southern Africa.

Researchers from Queen's, including both faculty and graduate students, will work with African partners on food security issues, while scholars from African universities will spend time at Queen's. Undergraduate students at Queen's may apply for internships through the Department of Global Development Studies. Also involved with the project are researchers at other Canadian universities including Western, Calgary, Guelph and Ryerson.

The CIDA UPCD program funds projects between Canadian universities and education and training organizations in developing countries. The goal is to enhance the latter's institutional capacity to develop the human resources to address their countries' most important development needs in sustainable ways. At the same time, partners respond to the needs of local communities in developing countries.

Source: Queen's University