

Protecting the future: HIV prevention, care and support among displaced and war-affected populations

Author: Wendy Holmes, International Rescue Committee

Publisher: Kumarian Press/International Rescue Committee, Bloomfield, CT, USA; 2003

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In common with war and other emergencies, the spread and impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has the potential to destroy the security fabric of communities, countries and entire regions. For the professionals involved in them, humanitarian interventions offer challenges but also endless opportunities to address this pandemic. In particular, the post-emergency phases of such interventions provide an important transition between humanitarian response and development where HIV/AIDS activities can be integrated into targeted planning and actions.

Protecting the future should be essential reading for all stakeholders in humanitarian interventions since it addresses the dual tragedy of HIV/AIDS and crises in a realistic manner — as well as offering excellent guidance on how to integrate HIV/AIDS activities into programmes. Clear directives are provided for protecting the future of people whose lives have been made vulnerable by war, displacement and the threat of HIV/AIDS. It addresses this vulnerability in detail and provides directives to respond to it that are relevant for anyone directly involved in dealing with this problem at the community level.

Nevertheless, it does omit a few topics whose inclusion would have made it even better; for example, food security and the use of food as a commodity in exchange for sex in situations of humanitarian crisis. Also not covered are the specific food needs of people living with HIV/AIDS as well as the burden placed by HIV/AIDS on the heads of households who are responsible for cultivating food — both

of which are exacerbated by war and population displacement as well as by the prevalence of HIV.

These omissions apart, the book provides a range of different options that could be used in a wide range of scenarios. It has been very carefully thought out and put together — providing humanitarian agencies and aid workers with a very useful field tool that is extremely flexible and easily adapted to a variety of different contexts. Both strategically and technically, it is very practical and, given the difficulties of the issues involved, surprisingly user friendly. Complex topics are addressed straightforwardly and concisely, but always in a thorough, rigorous and comprehensive way. The information provided is current and the presentation clear and step-by-step. Useful and practical checklists and annexes are included and the references are up to date. And crucially, it achieves its central objective — to help integration of HIV/AIDS activities into responses to both short- and long-term humanitarian challenges.

Protecting our future is a recommended read. It deserves to be widely distributed so that as many people as possible will benefit from its insights and recommendations. The book will undoubtedly prove to be an extremely useful instrument for anyone dealing with HIV/AIDS among displaced and war-affected populations. ■

Gael Lescornec¹

Empowering squatter citizen: local government, civil society, and urban poverty reduction

Editors: Diana Mitlin & David Satterthwaite

Publisher: Earthscan, London; 2004

ISBN: 1844071014; softcover; 336 pages, price £19.95

This book sets itself apart from the myriad of recent books that make “global” declarations for poverty reduction and those that microanalyse anti-poverty programmes. Instead, it presents sound, critical reviews of stra-

tegic, methodological and operational approaches to reducing urban poverty and facilitates understanding the complex issues associated with such poverty.

Although poverty and impoverishment are ultimately caused by global inequality gaps, the authors argue that locally experienced deprivations need to be dealt with at the local level. This proposal is based both on the limitations of local urban organizations to change global economic circumstances and on their abilities to find and implement solutions that may improve daily living conditions at the local level.

The book's authors challenge many of the current definitions, measurements and intervention models associated with urban poverty. They argue that all of urban poverty's visible manifestations as well as the basic deprivations associated with it (income; material and non-material assets base; housing; public infrastructure; basic (social/urban) services; safety nets; protection of the poor's rights; and voicelessness and powerlessness of the poor) occur simultaneously but to different degrees and are caused and reinforced by mechanisms that are specific to each setting. Poverty's institutional, ideological and political dimensions — those that “empowerment” and “citizenship” ultimately refer to — are incorporated by the authors into a conceptual and operational definition as well as into the design and implementation of strategies to overcome or reduce poverty.

The largest part of the book is devoted to analyses of the experiences of four government-oriented (in Mexico, Nicaragua, Philippines and Thailand) and four community-driven interventions (in Brazil, India, Pakistan, and South Africa) and to proposed concrete strategic and operational guidelines for use by the main stakeholders involved in tackling urban poverty. The need for long-term, flexible, interactive initiatives is stressed. It is recommended that such initiatives interconnect stakeholders' interventions at the local level; build-up associative — rather than confrontational — strategies; set up institutional arrangements, with the active protagonists being

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the poor themselves; and give priority to groups that examine and address their own goals continuously. In addition, the initiatives should strengthen, foster and accompany the active constitution of the poor's sociopolitical identity using rights-based approaches —rather than treating them as mere recipients of need-driven, centrally defined projects. Recent comparative assessments in Latin America confirm that the growth potential of these types of initiatives is stronger and more sustainable if goal- and rights-driven grass roots organizations have been set up and are running prior to and independently of any external interventions.

Broadly then, the book deals with poverty and strategies to reduce it. In a stricter sense, however, it mainly covers the ways in which governments, nongovernmental organizations, civil society and grass roots organizations, international donors, and multilateral agencies should relate to each in tackling poverty. In this respect, it clearly stresses the need to set (and suggests strategic directions for) major institutional, operational and methodological changes to make it easier for players to act effectively at the local level.

The book also poses some crucial questions:

- Who empowers whom and who pays for it, under different political-institutional settings?
- How should the possible paths to setting and managing “partnership” or similar management programmes evolve in settings where stakeholders' rationales and logic are contradictory and operate on very different scopes and time frames – for example, public urban infrastructure and utilities under private management or subject to privatization processes?
- What are the different “qualities of citizenship” to be achieved by poor segments of the population in progressively dualized economies/ societies, given that even locally successful poverty reduction strategies may not stem the growth of the inequality gap.

In summary, this is a well structured, authoritative and reliable book. ■

Jorge L. Karol¹

Marijuana and madness

Editors: David Castle, Robin Murray
 Publisher: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England; 2004
 ISBN: 0521819407; hardback; 234 pages; price £45.00

This monograph is the professional person's guide to the psychological effects of cannabis use — a sort of everything you need to know about cannabis. It consists of 13 chapters, each written by some of the principal experts in this field. For the most part the chapters are up-to-date reviews although some original data are presented. The chapters on neurochemistry cover the endogenous cannabinoid system and the relation between cannabis and other transmitter systems. These topics are well written and contain minimal redundancy.

The chapters that deal with the more clinical aspects include both the acute and subacute effects of cannabis use, the cognitive effects of cannabis, the “controversial” cannabis psychosis, and importantly a number of excellent

reviews of the relationship between cannabis use and the onset and course of schizophrenia. These chapters critically review the latest research in these areas.

Practical issues are dealt with in the chapters that examine the link between cannabis and depression in young people. Importantly there is also an excellent review on what motivates patients with psychosis to continue using cannabis and equally importantly a chapter on addressing this problem in the clinical situation.

All in all, this is an excellent and up-to-date reference text for any professional with an interest in cannabis use and its links to psychopathology. All the chapters are extremely well written, the references are comprehensive and up to date, and it is a credit to the international group of contributors. This is an easy-to-read, evidence-based review of cannabis and is important in view of its increasing consumption especially by young people. This is indeed the informed persons' guide to marijuana use and its adverse sequelae. ■

Christopher Tennant²

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