



> For Education Policy-Makers

Quality Education for Girls and Women and HIV/AIDS

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The international community is firmly committed to achieving gender equality in education

Education is a fundamental human right for everyone. This principle, clearly stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, has been reiterated and reaffirmed at numerous international occasions ever since.

Achieving gender parity and equality in education has been signaled as a priority in a number of international fora in recent years:

> In 1990, at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand:

Agreement to universalize primary education by the year 2000 and to meet the basic learning needs of all children, young people and adults.

> In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China:

Adoption of the Platform for Action that called upon to improve women's access to education and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in both public and private life.

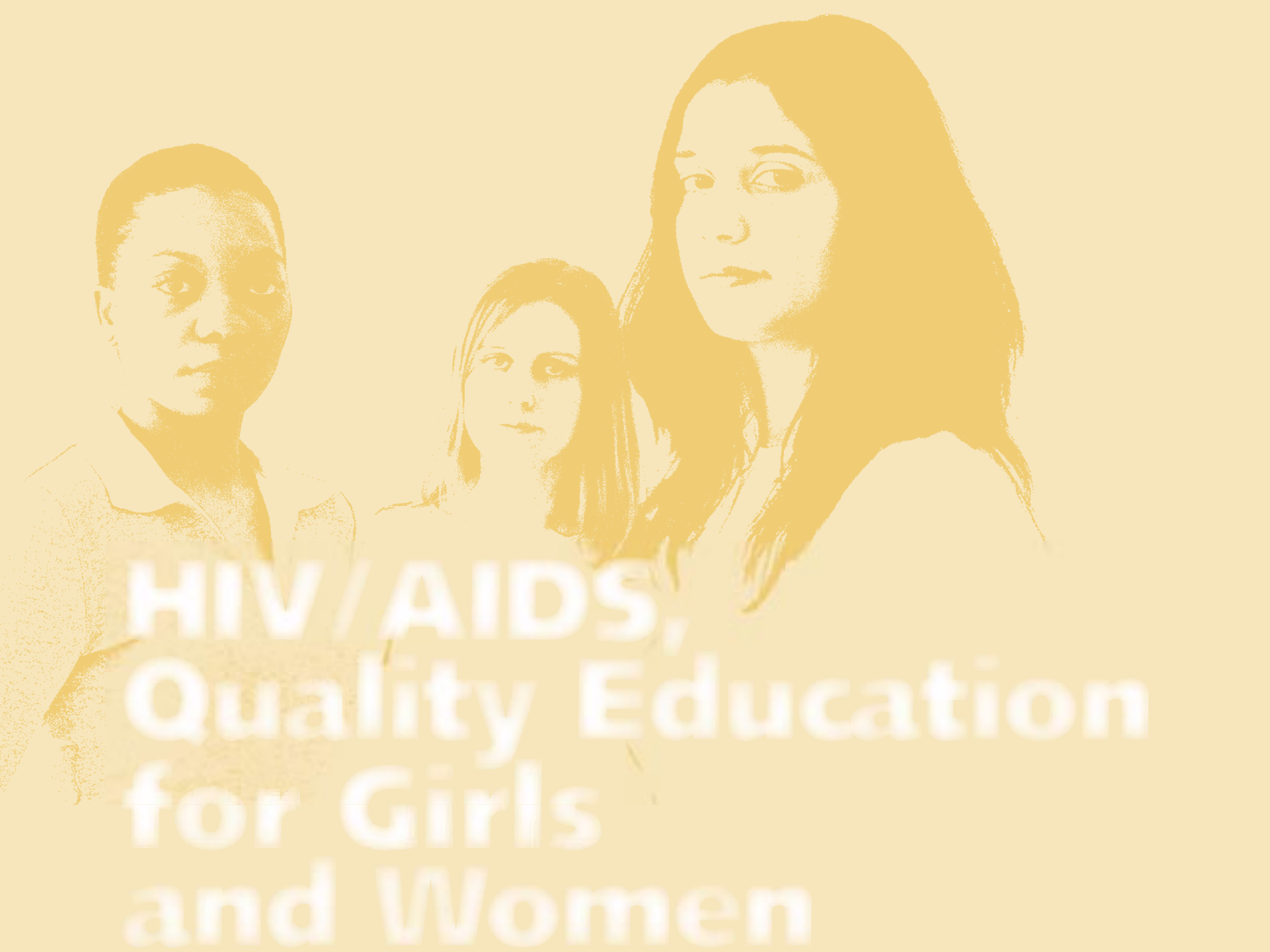
> In 2000, at the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal:

Adoption of the Dakar Framework for Action that affirmed the commitment to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and to achieve gender equality by the year 2015.

> In 2000, at the Millennium Summit held in New York, the United States of America:

Adoption of the UN Millennium Development Declaration resolving to ensure universal primary education for all girls and boys.

Yet, many of the world's girls and women are still denied access to education for a variety of economic, social and cultural reasons. A large number of children of primary school age are not participating in the school system and about 57% of such children are girls. Approximately 800 million adults have not attained literacy and 64% of adult illiterates are women.¹



HIV/AIDS, Quality Education for Girls and Women



The arrival of HIV/AIDS on the scene has added challenges to achieving gender equality in education

In the two decades since the first AIDS case was diagnosed, more than 20 million people have died of AIDS and nearly 40 million are currently living with HIV.² Women, particularly young women, are among the worst affected. The proportion of HIV-positive women has been increasing alarmingly. In 1997, women were 41% of people living with HIV and the figure rose to almost 50% in 2002.³ Deepening poverty and structural and social inequities are some of the major causes of women's vulnerability to HIV infection.

Increasing numbers of children throughout the world are being orphaned by AIDS – it is estimated that in sub-Saharan Africa alone more than 11 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS.⁴ Without their parental support, orphans often face various challenges, jeopardizing their well-being and human rights, including their right to education. It was reported that orphans losing both parents are less likely to attend school.⁵ Orphaned girls are often the first to be pulled from school to help with household chores and care for infected family members.



Quality Education for Girls and Women: Effective and lasting responses to HIV/AIDS⁶

While HIV/AIDS presents a considerable challenge to achieving Quality Education for All, education has proved to be the best arena for tackling the issues. Retention in a functional education system is likely to reduce girls' and women's vulnerability to HIV infection. It has been found that women with primary education are 2.5 times more likely than women with no schooling to correctly identify ways to prevent HIV transmission.⁷ Studies conducted in 17 African and 4 Latin American countries show that better educated girls tend to delay the start of their sexual activity. The proportion of girls who were sexually experienced by the age of 18 was 24% lower among those with a secondary education than among those who have been only to primary school.⁸



Quality education provides girls and women with basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS and skills to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS

Girls and women are often "expected" to know little about sex and sexuality, but this lack of knowledge in turn increases their risk of infection. Quality education ensures content that is relevant to the lives of girls and women living in a world with HIV/AIDS. Curricula should be relevant to their daily concerns and be sensitive to them, containing information about human rights, gender and health issues, including HIV prevention and learning to live harmoniously in a world with HIV/AIDS. Girls and women need to learn not only knowledge but also skills that will enable them to apply their knowledge outside the classroom.



Quality education needs teachers who are well prepared for the challenges

Many of the day-to-day educational activities are primarily the responsibility of the teacher. Teachers should be trained, through both pre-service and in-service training, in HIV/AIDS, human rights and life skills-based approaches.

It is well established that transmission, infection and impact of HIV/AIDS are significantly affected by gender relations. Gender norms deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context create an unequal balance of power between women and men in many societies. Women's economic status, which is often lower than that of men, also makes women more vulnerable to HIV infection. Therefore, teachers must receive sufficient training in gender issues and may have to adjust their classroom behaviors to respect girls' and women's rights. Educational change on gender relations can help reduce gender inequality in school and in society.⁹



Quality education respects the experience that girls and women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS can bring to the classroom

All learners add to the learning process by contributing many things – their experience, their skills, their knowledge – which benefit other learners. Girls and women living in households affected by HIV/AIDS can bring with them a wealth of practical skills as they may have very high levels of competence and responsibilities due to the demand placed on them for their families. With these experiences, they can enhance their own and others' learning.



Quality education provides a safe and supportive learning environment and offers protection from discrimination and violence

The learning environment is a crucial dimension of quality education, from physical facilities to the prevailing atmosphere in the schools. Schools are not always as safe as we assume, and would like them to be. Girls and women are often subject to many forms of violence – from verbal harassment, such as bullying and name-calling, to physical and sexual abuse and coercion.

Stigma and discrimination against HIV/AIDS – most often based on misconceptions about HIV transmission, prejudice, social fears and anxieties about sexuality, illness and death, and lack of treatment options – continue to profoundly impact girls and women and their education. HIV-infected girls are often shunned by their schoolmates, and denied equal participation in school activities, or access to facilities. Moreover, the fear of discrimination may make girls and women less likely to disclose their HIV status, seek treatment or report acts of violence.

It is essential that the learning environments not only provide the physical protection from violence that girls and women need to feel safe and secure, but that they convey effective messages about gender equality, freedom from discrimination and a respect for human rights.



Quality education empowers women and girls while also involving men and boys

Gender does not mean only female, and more and more programmes are turning to interventions that also target boys and men as a means of increasing their awareness of power and gender dynamics. Quality education educates males to be responsible for their behaviours and to move away from approaches that place all the responsibility for improved gender relations on women and girls.



Education policy-makers must be ready to meet the challenge

The days have long past where HIV/AIDS can be considered to be solely a public health concern. It is clearly an educational issue, and without the support of education officials the current alarming trends will continue and the goals of Quality Education for All, especially for women and girls, will remain unattained.



Making education policies and plans responsive to HIV/AIDS

Education officials, working closely with health and other ministries, need to re-examine their policies to develop a long-term vision and together, come up with strategic plans for dealing with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Leaders and decision-makers must make concrete commitments and take practical steps to confront the challenge.



Committing and allocating resources

In order to be effective, programmes and policies must be backed by sufficient resources for their implementation and follow-up. Resources must be factored into education budgets that will allow education systems to confront the issues surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic.



Adapting administrative systems

In many countries, governments and ministries are themselves increasingly affected by HIV/AIDS. Supportive workplace policies must be established for government workers who are HIV-infected and who are called on to care for infected members. Individuals' rights to confidentiality about their HIV status must be well respected. Those living with HIV/AIDS should be actively included in decision-making processes, planning and designing activities, as their participation is crucial to respond to the epidemic effectively.



Exploring non-formal education

School-based education is not sufficient, as it does not reach those who do not attend school. Girls comprise 57 percent of all out-of-school children and innovative programmes to reach them through non-formal education must be sought after.¹⁰ Community involvement is a key in any HIV/AIDS programme, especially in the non-formal context. Programmes should be designed in close collaboration with the community.



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Responding to HIV/AIDS through concerted, national efforts

HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care cannot be addressed separately and call for a multi-sectoral, coordinated approach that combine human rights, development and strategic planning and involve all relevant government structures and civil society. A number of countries have demonstrated the value of educational policies that are clearly part of a wider and well-integrated national effort to combat HIV/AIDS.

For example, Uganda, which once had the highest HIV infection rates in the world, is one of the very few countries to have succeeded in reversing the epidemic. Their strategy is characterized by a multi-sectoral approach involving political commitment at the highest level, and strong involvement of civil society and NGOs.¹¹



Monitoring and evaluation

To counter the lack of reliable data on the effects of HIV/AIDS on education, it is essential that good indicators be developed and monitoring systems put into place. Silence around HIV/AIDS makes it difficult to collect data. However, without such indicators, effective planning cannot take place and resources will not be committed to where they are needed most. There is much to learn about what works and what does not work to curb the epidemic and good practices should be shared widely. Special attention should be paid to ensure confidentiality regarding one's HIV status.

1) EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, 2004, EFA Global Monitoring Report: The Quality Imperative, UNESCO, Paris.

2) UNAIDS, 2004, Report on the global AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS, Geneva.

3) UNAIDS, 2004, Report on the global AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS, Geneva.

4) USAID/UNAIDS/ UNICEF, 2002, Children on the Brink 2002, USAID, Washington, DC.

5) UNICEF, 2003, The State of the World's Children 2004, UNICEF, New York.

6) For more comprehensive discussion on quality education and HIV/AIDS, see: Mary Joy Pigozzi, 2004, Quality Education and HIV/AIDS, UNESCO, Paris.

7) Global Campaign for Education, 2004, Learning to survive: How education for all would save millions of young people from HIV/AIDS.

8) UNAIDS, 2000, Report on the global AIDS epidemic, UNAIDS, Geneva.

9) EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, 2003, EFA Global Monitoring Report: The Leap to Equality, UNESCO, Paris.

10) EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, 2004, EFA Global Monitoring Report: The Quality Imperative, UNESCO, Paris.

11) EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, 2002, EFA Global Monitoring Report: Is the World on Track?, UNESCO, Paris.



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This material was prepared as part of UNESCO's contribution to the 2004 World AIDS Campaign "Girls, Women, HIV and AIDS", aimed at enhancing capacity of the education system to deal with the impact of the HIV/AIDS on quality education, and quality education's response to it.

UNESCO is committed to contribute to the global effort to curb the HIV/AIDS epidemic by offering learning opportunities for all to develop the knowledge, skills, competencies, values and attitudes that will reduce the risk of transmission. UNESCO also seeks to minimize the impact of HIV/AIDS on the education sector to protect its core functions.

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