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Managing educational quality in the context of HIV and AIDS: development of a district-level data collection model in Malawi

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Lessons learned:

- Maintaining and enhancing educational quality is difficult in a country like Malawi that is highly affected by HIV and AIDS. HIV and AIDS-related causes are often cited as a major cause of teacher and learner absenteeism, but there is a lack of concrete and reliable data.
- Routine and systematic data collection on teacher and learner absenteeism, illness, death and orphan status is needed to provide the basis for informed policies and planning such as finding substitute teachers and assisting school management committees, NGOs and other bodies in supporting persons affected by HIV and AIDS.



Source: UNESCO National Commission for Malawi

Recommendations:

- Issues of sustainability and replicability need to be carefully considered at the onset of such an initiative.
- Co-ordination among stakeholders at country level is key to ensure the rationalization of data collection and avoid overburdening school heads and district offices.

Background:

- In November 2005, the Ministry of Education, the UNESCO National Commission for Malawi and the International Institute for Educational Planning designed a model for a local information database in two districts of the Centre-West Education Division - Lilongwe Urban and Rural West (over 250 schools).
- The aim of the database was to capture HIV impact on staff and learners to monitor educational quality in a context of decentralization in order to strengthen the capacities of district education offices, primary education advisors and head teachers to monitor educational quality.

Methods:

- A situational analysis at all levels (central, district and school) was carried out to assess ongoing activities and information needs.
- The process was participatory and iterative, leading to various revisions in the design of the district-level database before agreeing on the final version.

Results:

- Preliminary data for 2006 revealed that the main reasons for teacher absenteeism were personal sickness or that of a relative, and funeral attendance.
- The results also pointed to a large number of orphans, sometimes as high as 20% of learners. School absenteeism and drop-out were higher among orphans compared to non-orphans.

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