

Swaziland: Positive Speaking Involves Young People Living with HIV in School-based Prevention Programmes

EDUCAIDS Country Snapshot



A Positive Speaking ambassador makes her mother proud.

Information about HIV and education in Swaziland

Swaziland is experiencing a hyperendemic epidemic and has the highest HIV prevalence worldwide, estimated at 25.9% among people aged 15-49. Prevalence is slightly lower for 15-24 year-olds, measured at 15.6% among females and 6.5% among males. An estimated 52.1% of 15-24 year-olds can both correctly identify ways of preventing sexual transmission of HIV and reject major misconceptions about transmission of the virus. Life skills-based HIV education is reportedly being provided in 43.5% of primary schools and 70.8% of secondary schools. (Source: UNAIDS Country Profile and 2008 UNGASS Progress Report for Swaziland, available at <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/swaziland/>)

How the education sector response to HIV and AIDS has been supported

The 'Positive Speaking' methodology, established by UNESCO in partnership with the Swaziland National Network of People living with HIV and AIDS (SWANNEPHA), represents an important step forward in strengthening school-based prevention efforts, addressing stigma and discrimination, and reaching out to positive learners.

A team of ten 'young ambassadors' living openly with HIV and affiliated with SWANNEPHA, was trained in 2010 to facilitate prevention interventions in schools and share their personal experiences as young people living with HIV. Two local celebrities – a DJ and a soccer player – have also supported the initiative, periodically joining the young ambassadors' school outreach efforts. In addition to peer-to-peer education and open and honest discussion, Positive Speaking has provided an opportunity for young ambassadors to connect other young people living with HIV with critical social support and health services.

These efforts have been made possible thanks to the financial support provided to UNESCO by the Virginio Bruni-Tedeschi Foundation and the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), among other partners.

What was achieved

Many learners have approached the young facilitators at their interventions, sharing their positive status and requesting help and support. As a result of Positive Speaking, many students have been referred to health and social support services, and four support groups are being newly established for adolescents living with HIV.

« I have been on treatment for HIV for about two years now and everyone at school, including teachers and my peers, knows that I am HIV-positive. Before the 'young ambassadors' visited my schools, I was really angry against

my parents for that they one day gave birth to me. But now, I realise that life is precious and that my parents gave me the best present ever, and that is my life. I have joined a support group and I now have new friends who really understand my problems and with whom I now feel free to speak openly. I am not afraid anymore that someone finds out about my status, and I love my parents! » (A., 17 year-old girl)

What we learned

- People living with HIV are an important resource for improving prevention, treatment, care and support services and outreach, as recognized in the UNAIDS Principles promoting Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA).
- Existing systems and country-level efforts target orphans and vulnerable children, but do not adequately and comprehensively address the specific needs of young people and learners living with HIV, such as psychosocial support and treatment education.
- Positive Speaking provides a successful, innovative and promising school-based intervention, in which:
 - Learners are more likely to feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues such as dating, sexuality, condoms and HIV and AIDS, and are also more receptive to advice from peers living with HIV, rather than to being lectured in a theoretical, abstract and potentially judgemental or ideologically biased manner.
 - Common myths and misconceptions about HIV and AIDS can be effectively addressed, and discriminatory and stigmatising attitudes minimised, by the peer-to-peer approach of Positive Speaking.
 - Positive Speaking is responsive to the needs of learners living with HIV, who are then provided access to local support groups and social and health services through referrals.

EDUCAIDS is a UNAIDS multi-country initiative – led by UNESCO – to support the implementation of comprehensive education sector responses to HIV and AIDS



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