

Angola: Positive students and teachers as agents of change – the 'Photo-Voice' method of influencing leaders and communities

EDUCAIDS Country Snapshot



I had just passed the examinations as a teacher when I realised that I was HIV-positive. The news spread to all corners. I was severely discriminated against both by my colleague teachers and pupils at school. I left the rural school where I was working near my village and came to Luanda where I felt more accepted and anonymous but less useful professionally. [Self-portrait and testimony by an HIV-positive young male teacher for the photo-voice project in Angola]

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

The Photo-Voice project conducted in Angola uses an innovative methodology whereby students and educators affected by HIV and AIDS were provided with cameras to document their personal stories on the theme of 'Students and Teachers Affected by HIV and AIDS: Agents of Change and Builders of Hope'. This was intended to provide students, teachers and education personnel affected by HIV and AIDS with an opportunity for awareness-building within their communities and for the photos and accompanying testimonies to serve as a tool to inform and advocate with policymakers on key issues around HIV and AIDS in the education sector.

UNESCO worked in partnership with the national network of people living with HIV (PLHIV) to launch the Photo-Voice project in two provinces: Luanda and Cunene. Other partners involved in this process included the Ministry of Education and the National AIDS Commission. Eighty photo-stories from 60 participants were selected for exhibitions that were open to the public. School visits to the exhibitions were arranged and launch events were held on World AIDS Day 2010. HIV counseling and testing services were offered on a voluntary basis during those events.

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), amongst others.

Information about HIV and education in Angola

In 2009, the HIV prevalence in the general population was 2.4% with the primary mode of transmission of the virus being via sexual transmission. Among 15-24 year olds, the prevalence is 1.7% (2009), which represents a decline from 2.7% in 2007. However, only 28.4% of young people aged 15-24 can correctly identify ways of preventing HIV and reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission. The majority of schools (82%) were providing life skills-based HIV education in 2008, the last academic year for which these data are available. <http://www.unaids.org/en/Regionscountries/Countries/Angola/>

What was achieved

The Photo-Voice project reached 50 schools, 240 teachers and 2,650 learners through the school visits to the exhibitions organised on World AIDS Day. The involvement of students and teachers living with HIV in these school-based interventions has proven to be extremely beneficial, especially ensuring that:

- The use of photos and personal testimonies enabled students to feel more comfortable to engage in open discussions about sensitive issues on HIV and AIDS.
- The project dispelled common myths and misconceptions about HIV and AIDS, and addressed widespread stigmatising attitudes and discriminatory behaviours towards positive teachers and students in schools.
- At a policy level, the project helped sensitise political leaders and policymakers on issues affecting teachers and students who live with HIV. This led to a re-positioning of the education sector at the centre of the national response to HIV and AIDS, as can be seen in the development process of the Education Sector Strategic Plan and Policy.

"The testimonies and the texts of our young PLHIV have revealed the weakness of our social policies to promote sustainable prevention initiatives, treatment and care for our younger people and education personnel living with HIV... Our government needs more interventions and investments in schools to keep the education sector as a tool for HIV prevention." (Dr. Aurora dos Santos, National Director for School Welfare, Ministry of Education)

What we learned

- The photos, testimonies and personal experiences showcased through the Photo-Voice initiative is an innovative way to draw in young people, both in-school and out-of-school, and provide them with key HIV prevention messaging and voluntary HIV counselling and testing services.

- These photos and personal stories are also an emotive and effective means for people living with HIV to be actively involved in the education sector's response to HIV and AIDS.
- It is important to advocate with and sensitise decision makers to the issues of teachers and students living with HIV so that they are addressed by the education sector.

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