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Strengthening the support to and engagement of HIV-positive teachers' networks and groups in East and Southern Africa

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Lessons learned:

- Teachers hold a special position in our societies. They educate our children and act as custodians, serving as positive role models and providing adult supervision. At the same time teachers - just like anyone else - are vulnerable to HIV infection.
- Precisely because of the teacher's special role, parents may feel it is unacceptable for their child to be taught by an HIV-positive teacher.
- The education sector has the responsibility to support all teachers, regardless of their HIV status, and to demonstrate zero tolerance towards acts of HIV-related discrimination.

Recommendations:

- Identify the varying needs of HIV-positive teachers
- Prioritise zero tolerance towards HIV-related stigma and discrimination
- Involve teacher unions
- Support workplace policies
- Review teacher deployment and relief policies
- Support HIV-positive teacher networks

Methods:

- UNESCO, together with Education International (EI), Education Development Center (EDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), convened a consultation with HIV-positive teachers and other key stakeholders from ministries of education and teachers' unions in December 2006.
- Participants included representatives from Kenya, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- The consultation aimed to:
 - Determine the unique needs and the impact of HIV on HIV-positive teachers, which - to date - has received relatively little focused attention; and
 - Identify the type and level of support required to adequately address HIV-positive teachers' needs.

Background:

- East and Southern Africa are the two regions in the world that are most highly affected by HIV and AIDS. A significant number of people with HIV are educators, ranging from primary school teachers to head teachers and university lecturers.
- HIV-positive teachers often experience high levels of stigma and discrimination due to their custodian role in society
- Given the sensitivity this issue may have in some communities, it appears that some teachers' unions and governments have been uncertain about how to respond to the needs of HIV-positive teachers.
- There have been piecemeal efforts in many countries in East and Southern Africa but, to date, little has been done to draw together experiences to develop a comprehensive response for HIV-positive teachers.



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Results:

- The mobilisation of HIV-positive teachers has been slow and piecemeal.
- Networks of HIV-positive teachers were created to address a similar set of challenges in the region: low access to treatment, poor working conditions, and stigma and discrimination in the workplace.
- Teacher unions represent the views of teachers and act on their behalf. Therefore, the unions should play a central role in protecting the rights of HIV-positive teachers.