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Supporting the educational needs of HIV-positive learners: lessons from Tanzania and Namibia

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Lessons learned:

- HIV-positive learners do not see the benefit of disclosing their status and cite high levels of stigma and discrimination in the classroom.
- Ministries of Education are not addressing the issue, especially as it is so hidden.
- HIV and AIDS exacerbate existing problems in education. The sector has difficulty in meeting the needs of learners in general and HIV-positive learners in particular.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a compulsory module on HIV and AIDS into pre-service and in-service teacher training courses;
- Increase provision of school counsellors to support vulnerable children;
- Exercise zero tolerance towards HIV-related stigma and discrimination in schools while promoting a culture of tolerance and inclusion.

Methods:

The research included:

- Desk review
- Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 80 respondents (Tanzania) and 76 (Namibia) in urban and rural areas.
- Respondents included children, young people, teachers, ministry officials and NGO representatives.
- Ethical guidelines based on ICW (International Community of Women living with HIV) guidelines

Background:

- In this era of expanded access to antiretroviral treatment (ART), the population of children and adults living with HIV is growing as their life expectancy increases.
- There are an estimated 2.3 million children (below the age of 15) living with HIV worldwide. The number of new infections among the same age group in 2006 alone was estimated to be 530,000 (UNAIDS, 2006).
- The increase in the number of children and young people living with HIV poses new challenges to the education sector, particularly in terms of ensuring equal educational opportunities and access to HIV-positive learners as part of efforts towards Education for All (EFA).

Results:

- Very similar findings from both Namibia and Tanzania.
- Young people view the negative consequences of disclosing as far greater than the positive benefits.
- Teachers' responses to disclosure are individual, with some isolating the student and others providing extra support.
- Children in rural areas seemed to suffer more than those in urban areas due to less available services, increased poverty and more difficulty in hiding their HIV status.
- Data are lacking on the numbers of HIV-positive children and young people.



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