

# The impact of HIV and AIDS on higher education institutions in Uganda

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## Lessons learned:

- Lack of information on the occurrence of AIDS-related illnesses, absenteeism or death among staff and students has perpetuated the silence that surrounds HIV and AIDS within higher education institutions and created a misplaced view that HIV and AIDS do not constitute a serious problem. This has resulted in inadequate institutional responses to HIV and AIDS.

## Recommendations:

- There is a need to sensitize the top management of higher education institutions to the potential impact of HIV and AIDS on their institutions.
- Higher education institutions should be assisted to develop education management information systems (EMIS) that are sensitive to HIV and AIDS for purposes of monitoring their impact.
- Heads of institutions and administrative staff should be trained on the importance of having HIV and AIDS institutional and workplace policies that address HIV and AIDS in their totality.

## Background:

- Several studies in sub-Saharan Africa have shown that HIV and AIDS affect the functions and operations of higher education institutions.
- Research carried out in 2006 by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning aimed to establish the magnitude of the problem in Uganda, examining the perceived and known impacts of the pandemic and institutional responses.

## Methods:

- In-depth case studies were carried out at one of the national universities and in a teachers' college in a rural setting to explore staff and students' perceptions of HIV and AIDS and their impact on these establishments.
- A survey of the top management in the remaining 58 higher education institutions was carried out to validate the findings.



## Results:

- Interviews and focus-group discussions revealed that institutions were experiencing loss of staff, increased workload, low morale and efficiency, and difficulties in replacing highly trained staff. This affected educational quality and students' performance.
- HIV and AIDS are shrouded by a culture of silence and denial, largely owing to social stigma. Students and staff are reluctant to seek voluntary counselling, testing and treatment even where available free of charge. Female support staff and students were considered most at risk.
- Few higher education institutions have developed responses to HIV and AIDS, and fewer still have established structures or allocated budgets. Neither the college nor the university had an HIV and AIDS strategic plan, as was the case for 86% of the remaining institutions surveyed.
- Findings showed that while HIV and AIDS were affecting students, staff and the operations of higher education institutions, they were not perceived to be as important as more visible urgencies such as inadequate resources and infrastructure and low salaries. Attempts to integrate HIV prevention education in the curriculum were evident in only 40% of the institutions surveyed.