

Teachers Living with HIV

Advocacy Briefing Note

Advocacy Briefing Notes have been developed by the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on Education aim to assist education professionals to advocate for issues related to education sector responses to HIV.

The first four in the series (2008) address:

- Girls' Education and HIV Prevention
- HIV and AIDS Education in Emergencies
- Mainstreaming HIV in Education
- Teachers Living with HIV

About the UNAIDS IATT on Education

The UNAIDS IATT on Education was created in 2002 to support accelerated and improved education sector responses to HIV and AIDS.

It is convened by UNESCO and includes as members UNAIDS Cosponsors, bilateral agencies, private donors, and civil society partners.

It has as specific objectives to promote and support good practices in the education sector in relation to HIV and AIDS and to encourage alignment and harmonisation within and across agencies to support global and country-level actions.

For more information on the IATT on Education: <http://www.unesco.org/aids/iatt>

Introduction

Teachers play a key custodian role within the education system. They serve as role models, mentors and guardians. They are also central to efforts to achieve the **Education for All (EFA)** and **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, as education is seen both as a right and as a central pillar of efforts to eradicate poverty. Like all members of the population, however, teachers are susceptible to HIV. In countries with high HIV infection rates, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa, this susceptibility is increasingly noticeable. As more and more teachers die, an already weakened educational system is left with the dual challenge of increasing numbers of pupils and decreasing numbers of teachers.

Current Situation

Teachers in countries with high HIV prevalence rates are both infected and affected by the virus. Global estimates suggest that the cost of HIV to the educational system could be as much as \$1 billion per year as a result of teacher deaths and absenteeism, severely hindering the ability of education systems to deliver a quality education.ⁱ

- In some countries, a tenfold increase in teacher mortality and absenteeism due to HIV and AIDS has severely reduced both teaching time and quality. Permanent or temporary absenteeism of one teacher can have strong repercussions on up to 100 children.^v
- Every month, 100 Tanzanian primary school teachers are estimated to die of AIDS-related illnesses and in 2006 alone an estimated 45,000 additional teachers were needed to replace those lost to the epidemic.^{vi}
- In Zambia, HIV and AIDS are expected to reduce the number of teachers by 2010 from an expected 59,500 to only 50,000.^{vii}
- 7,000 additional teachers will need to be trained in Swaziland by 2020 to compensate for AIDS deaths among teachers.
- In Kenya, over 14,500 teachers are thought to be HIV-positive.^{viii}
- HIV and AIDS are reported to account for up to 77% of teacher absenteeism in countries with high prevalence rates.^{ix}

Teachers living with HIV have an important role to play, both in efforts to prevent new infections and in helping to address the impact of HIV and AIDS on individuals, institutions and communities. Stigma and discrimination, however, still pose barriers to their involvement and the support available. For example, 75% of teachers recently surveyed in Kenya stated they did not know their HIV status. 60% of those not tested indicated that they did not want to know their status because they feared discrimination.^x

While most education ministries have policies related to teachers and HIV & AIDS, in many cases

Advocating for Change

If governments are to mitigate the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the education system, it is imperative that teachers living with HIV receive the support they need to live healthy lives and to become key advocates in the response to the

Stigma and discrimination continue to hinder effective responses to HIV and AIDS. In this respect, HIV-positive teachers have not been exempt, especially in communities where HIV is incorrectly seen as an indication of improper behaviour. Because of this sensitivity, schools, teachers' unions and governments have struggled with ways to support HIV-positive colleagues and, as a result, responses have been piecemeal and poorly documented. There is a great need to draw together experiences to develop a comprehensive response for HIV-positive teachers that fulfils their right to access HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services as well as their right to work without discrimination.

Early in the epidemic it was thought that teachers were at relatively high risk of HIV infection due to their high levels of social mobility.^{ii,iii} The majority of evidence now available, however, seems to indicate that prevalence rates among teachers are similar to those found in the general population.^{iv} While precise numbers remain unknown, the impact is well documented:

those policies do not transfer to the school level due to lack of implementation and action plans and limited resources for supporting infected and affected teachers. For example, in a recent study, more than 90% of countries reported policies on non-discrimination, but only 7% had guidelines for implementing universal precautions to prevent and safely manage accidents in schools.

Increasingly, teachers' unions have taken up the challenge of providing support for their members and implementing HIV and AIDS programming. To date, however, efforts are still limited in scope.

As respected members of their communities, they could and should be supported to play an important role in breaking down stigma and involved in decision-making around policies addressing HIV in the education sector.

A number of measures can help to ensure this:

- **Identify and address the varying needs of HIV-positive teachers** – Teachers are not a homogenous group and, as such, their experience of being HIV-positive will vary. To address their differing needs, it is necessary to assess the unique and varying situations that teachers face. Furthermore, a comprehensive response for supporting and involving teachers with HIV must recognise and target teachers at several levels: the individual (e.g. health and emotional well-being); the occupational (i.e. discrimination and absenteeism); the community (such as stigma); and the systemic (e.g. undermining of provision of education).
- **Tackle stigma and discrimination** – A key challenge when implementing any programme or policy is how to support HIV-positive teachers without increasing their vulnerability to stigma and discrimination. Advocacy is required at the community level to better understand stigma and discrimination and their harmful effects, and workplace policies established and reinforced to protect the rights of those infected with HIV (right to employment, right to education, right to health).
- **Ensure early access to prevention programmes, treatment, care and support** – One of the most urgent needs in countries with high prevalence rates is to ensure that teachers who are in need of treatment, care and support are able to access affordable and confidential information and services.
- **Prevent and address gender-based violence and sexual harassment** – Unions and governments should work together to establish codes of conduct that establish zero tolerance of sexual harassment and abuse in schools of students and colleagues. Codes of conduct for staff are critical to protect children, as well as to increase community confidence and demand for education.
- **Build links between teachers' unions and networks of HIV-positive teachers** – A recent consultation in Eastern Africa highlighted the pivotal role of HIV-positive teachers' networks and teachers' unions. Networks of HIV-positive teachers are active in many countries and have been vocal in promoting the needs of their members. Although these groups are growing, they may have limited membership, weak structures and low sustainability. Teachers' unions are one of the strongest potential allies of networks of teachers with HIV. With membership figures of over 90% in some countries, teachers' unions are the largest and most powerful bodies for promoting the welfare of teachers. However, some unions in the region have been unsure of how to support HIV-positive teachers.
- **Engage HIV-positive teachers in the education sector response to HIV and AIDS** – Their active engagement in advocacy, identification of needs and design of effective programmes is vital and should be supported at all levels (i.e. provincial, district and national levels). Good practice must be documented, disseminated and adapted by and for HIV-positive teachers.

Key Questions

1. How much teacher attrition is due to the epidemic? Is AIDS-related attrition qualitatively different to other forms of attrition?
2. Do stigma and discrimination in the school mask the true impact of HIV and AIDS? What programmes exist at the national and/or school level for teachers living with HIV? What has been the experience of these programmes, including outcomes to date and who is funding them?
3. How does AIDS-related absenteeism affect the quality of education? To what extent has teaching been affected by the epidemic? What other challenges has the epidemic created for teachers?
4. What role does positive living and the availability of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) play in mitigating impact? How can a school provide an enabling environment for teachers affected by HIV? What workplace policies, including access to ART, should be in place? What workplace policies and programmes, including access to ART, should be in place?
5. What support or training is provided to help school principals to deal with teacher absenteeism and death? With what effects?
6. How can unions advocate for rights and access in a harmonised and unified manner? Furthermore, how long can individual members provide their services without compensation?

Looking Forward

Teachers are vital to the success of achieving Education for All (EFA). They are also key role models in communities and as such, have an important role to play in breaking down stereotypes around HIV. To do this, however, it is imperative that policy makers, civil society and teachers themselves understand the true impact of the epidemic, both on the profession and upon those infected. Once this is more fully understood, it will be necessary to ensure that teachers feel protected and supported, both to know their status and then to engage in efforts aimed at combating the epidemic at all levels. Teachers' unions should support groups of teachers living with HIV to enhance their reach and to advocate for change and raise awareness.

Overview of IATT Activity

- Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). 2006. Film: *The Teaching Profession United Against HIV/AIDS*. Paris: ADEA.
- UNESCO and EI-EFAIDS. 2006. Technical Consultation on *Supporting HIV-positive Teachers in East and Southern Africa*, Nairobi, Kenya, 30 November – 1 December 2006.
- UNESCO and EI-EFAIDS. 2007. Consultation Report: *Supporting HIV-positive Teachers in East and Southern Africa*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Education International, the Education Development Center (EDC) and WHO. 2007. *Toolkit: Inclusion is the Answer: Unions Involving and Supporting Educators living with HIV*. Brussels, EI.
- World Bank, 2007. *Courage and Hope: Stories from Teachers Living with HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa*. Meeting of African Networks of Ministry of Education HIV & AIDS Focal Points, Nairobi, Kenya.

ⁱ Buss, T.F. and Patel, M. 2005. *Mitigating HIV/AIDS' Impacts on Teachers and Administrators in sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration.

ⁱⁱ Bennell, P., Hyde, K., Swainson, N. 2002. *The Impact of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic on the Education Sector in sub-Saharan Africa*. Sussex: Centre for International Education, University of Sussex.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hargreaves, J. and Glynn, J. 2002. Educational Attainment and HIV-1 Infection in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review. *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, Vol. 7, No. 6.

^{iv} Boler, T. 2004. *Approaches to Estimating the impact of HIV/AIDS on Teachers*. London: Save the Children and ActionAid International.

^v Rispel, L. 2006. *Education Sector Response to HIV and AIDS: Learning from good practices in Africa*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, Academy for Educational Development and Human Sciences Resource Council (HSRC).

^{vi} Beckmann, S. and Rai, P. 2004. *HIV/AIDS, Work and Development in the United Republic of Tanzania*. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO).

^{vii} Grassly, N. et al. 2003. The Economic Impact of HIV/AIDS on the Education Sector in Zambia. *AIDS* 17: 1039-1044.

^{viii} UNESCO and EFAIDS. 2006. *Supporting HIV-Positive Teachers in East and Southern Africa: Technical Consultation Report*. Paris: UNESCO.

^{ix} Global Campaign for Education (GCE). 2006. *Every Child Needs a Teacher*. Campaign Briefing. Brussels: GCE.