

PLANNING FOR PRACTICAL HIV/AIDS INTERVENTIONS IN EDUCATION

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Like a tropical storm, AIDS has burst violently and uncompromisingly on large parts of the African continent, inundating the social, economic, and development life of many countries. This despite the early warnings of steadily increasing HIV prevalence - which gave notice of the increased morbidity and mortality to come. Education, central to any prospect of growth and empowerment and already more or less dysfunctional in a number of countries across the continent, is particularly vulnerable. Systems that should be on the cutting edge of mitigation and containment are more often than not high-risk environments and a contributory part of the problem.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on the education systems of Africa and the communities they serve, is a body blow, certain to reverse hard won development dividends. The pandemic's impact on education is now a fact of life. It is not a single event in the history of Africa, but a factor that will condition and constrain the delivery, quality and output of education for a very long time to come.

Available research and the anecdotal evidence of our own observations puts this beyond question, and alerts us both to the scale of the human tragedy and the challenge for education system management. While the developing research agenda is growing in scope and depth, it remains true that analysis is bedeviled by data limitations and inaccuracy. Though fed by increasingly supportable assumptions and projections, we are no nearer any absolute measure of accuracy in our estimates and predictions, and the question is, does it matter?

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Order of Magnitude

The order of magnitude, give or take a few percentage points, is all too clear to even the most cursory examination. And indeed, if we *had* perfect data at our disposal, would it make any difference to what we would or could do with it. Education systems around Africa still battle to distribute textbooks and measure attendance. What would they do with precise and dependable data that tells them what they already intuitively know: That the system is in deep trouble and that the HIV/AIDS crisis is profoundly complicating and exacerbating all the sector's perennial problems.

Whether teachers are 50% or 60% more at risk than the equivalent age groups in the general population, or whether orphans constitute 9% or 11 % of the child population, is less important for now than the fact that we have to develop a framework for practical management response, for local officials and educators. Continuing research will narrow the margin of error to an acceptable degree in due course, and provide the basis for macro economic planning and projection; in the interim though, we need to tell a district manager what to do about a small school with no teacher or how to deal with child-headed households. In understanding that better data will not necessarily mean better response, we cannot afford to delay the development of management counter-measures.

Thus it is important to note that although HIV/AIDS may seem to be a comparatively new threat to education supply, quality and output, its practical impact on the education system will be to explode the scale of almost all the traditional problems that have dogged planning for decades. Enrolment, repetition, drop-in/drop-out, transition and other rates, equality of gender access and participation, pupil/teacher and pupil/classroom ratios, teacher attendance and contact time, textbook provision and inability to pay school fees, to name a few. In recognizing this, we have to understand that much of the apparent denial and reluctance of education officials to engage the problem may stem from the positioning of HIV/AIDS as an insoluble life and system-threatening problem in its own right. Without attempting to downplay the scale of the human tragedy, we have to empower system managers to see the problem in terms they are familiar with, and respond in a practical, and increasingly creative way.

We have to move beyond the paralysis induced by fear and uncertainty, and reinforce the security of systemic response to systemic problems, while parallel initiatives search for some medical intervention.

Opportunity in Crisis

Finally, we would like to suggest that in the midst of crisis, there is opportunity. The plethora of systemic problems discussed earlier have in large measure become entrenched in systemic thinking as insoluble facts of life; perhaps they

are not, and perhaps the complete revision of regulation and management response demanded by HIV/AIDS signals the chance to tackle some of these problems afresh. This observation also draws on the fact that HIV/AIDS has the potential to unite traditionally polarized camps in joint problem-solving strategies; Ministries of Education, teacher unions, parent organizations, NGOs and other sectors of government will discover common cause around the survival of the system and its underpinning role in society and economic development.

For all of these reasons, we would argue that the time has come to move forward with an action agenda, given the need to supply practical management tools and the very real value of providing evidence of a positive counter-offensive: Visible success in the face of denial and depression is a necessary regenerator of enthusiasm and commitment and may be precisely the tonic that the system needs to fight back.

HEARD is presently involved in applied research to establish a model for multifunctional Resource Centers, to service school clusters and provide a bricks-and-mortar facility for HIV/AIDS response, as well as an initiative to map and spatially analyze geographic areas of comparative risk. These initiatives hold great promise and will be reported in due course, but in the interim we believe it is imperative to provide direct support for officials and managers at the sharp end of the problem.

We would like to briefly present two examples of such response, currently in various stages of development, to illustrate that even modest initiatives may positively reinforce the systems' will to look beyond this crisis.

An HIV/AIDS Resource Kit for District Education Managers

HEARD has been supported by DfID to develop a comprehensive HIV/AIDS Resource Kit for education managers and officials working at the district level in countries throughout Africa. It should be stressed that this initiative is dependent on an important precondition: That is the full support and political commitment of the Ministries of Education involved, and their preparedness to write responsibility for HIV/AIDS monitoring, reporting and supporting into the job descriptions of these officials - and ideally for officials throughout the system. On this basis, the Resource Kit becomes a necessary tool to empower the officials concerned to carry out their prescribed tasks, and not another optional irritation in the life of an under-resourced and overwhelmed education official.

Objectives

Given this precondition, the objective is to provide a comprehensive HIV/AIDS information and management Resource Kit to empower district managers to:

- a) Understand and action their new role in monitoring, reporting and managing the impact of HIV/AIDS on the school communities under their control.
- b) Understand the facts and talk sensibly about the nature of the disease, its transmission and its potential impact on the community.
- c) Monitor and report early warning signs in the local system and provide leadership and guidance for a local school community program of counter-measures and support.
- d) Take creative management steps to mitigate impact on the schools under their control and ensure the continued provision of education and learning in a low risk environment.
- e) Help mobilize the school community and support structures within it, such as churches, sports clubs and women's clubs/institutes, to respond in terms of a framework of suggestions.
- f) Better understand and access support from NGOs, CBOs and other institutional or specialist parties.

Pilot Process

Once researched and drafted, the Resource Kit will be rigorously tested in operational conditions in four Southern African countries, to engage the Ministries and Departments of Education, related interest parties and district level officials in coordinated focus groups. The outcomes of these engagements will be considered and integrated into a revised draft and taken back to these same parties for final consideration and approval, before being consolidated into a Resource Kit suitable for possible local adaption and production in interested and participating countries.

This process will include the drafting of generic job descriptions that build on the existing or standard roles of district officials, to monitor, report and support, and will be tested for political, legal and systemic acceptability. It will also provide an introductory and training module designed for use at a regular district officials' meeting, intended for use by in-country trainers recruited and trained for this purpose.

The Resource Kit will be expressly designed for professional management use and will steer clear of emotive tone and content. Importantly, style will be short, simple sentences, in large type, and will avoid "development-speak" and complex use of language. There will be no copyright reserved in this work, although HEARD would wish to be kept aware of adaptations and improvements in order to contribute to future work in this field.

Draft Framework Content

In keeping with the Resource Kit theme, the management tool is introduced with guidelines on how best to use it and then divided into four sections:

Section One: A New Challenge for Education

Clear and concise factual information about the origin, transmission and consequences of HIV/AIDS, designed and formatted to facilitate removal and photocopying, or alternatively the reader quoting or repeating the information when necessary. A checklist format will identify key areas of impact in education, noting the possible implications of these for local level management, and their effect on existing human resource, supply or quality problems. Also included will be a set of commonly asked questions and clear, simple answers pertaining to the general problem and the impact on education in particular, again formatted for easy reading and suitable for removal and replication or quotation.

Section Two: District Monitoring, Reporting and Support

Provides a District Reporting Template for the manager to use and checklist all the issues that reflect or pertain to impact in the classroom and school community, based on returns from schools using an equivalent Reporting Templates provided via the Resource Kit to principals in the district. It will dovetail with and supplement standard reporting frameworks and practices, and summarize data to be carried forward to the Regional/Provincial/National levels using the same basic Template, to provide a developing sense of real impact on the ground. Importantly, this will simply be an extension of the district managers existing role and its effective use will enhance job performance and therefore be designed to appeal to his/her sense of self-interest.

A simple and adaptable spreadsheet model will also be provided to assist the MOE concerned to capture and analyze the district trends, and aggregate information currently in scarce supply.

Section Three: A Framework for Management Response

Deals with issues and situations that are not covered by official regulations and guidelines, or that cannot be urgently dealt with. It will include a module on practical problem solving skills, with pertinent examples, to provide a step-by-step guide to selecting the most effective option where regulations and policy are either absent or vague. It will provide a matrix of the kinds of problem an official might face, with a range of illustrative options available for prioritization and use.

For example, the illness or absence of teachers from small schools, with no prospect of replacement in the short-term: The matrix might suggest school closure at one end of the spectrum, or options including the co-option of teachers from a nearby school, opening after hours to facilitate this arrangement, handing over to the School Governing Body supported by radio lessons, the appointment of a pupil to act as a peer educator, the duplication of worksheets, or the

identification of a retired teacher or community volunteer to step in. Or any combination of the above, that facilitates the process of learning. A Reporting Format will also be provided to allow the district manager to report his response in due course, to provide examples of alternative practice and share his experience.

In effect, this will support creative problem solving in the face of difficulties on an unprecedented scale, and provide the basis for contingency planning and help alert the official and his hierarchy to the need to call on specialist support where available, such as counseling, replacement teachers and in-service training, etc.

Section Four: Mobilizing Community Support

Addresses the fact that HIV/AIDS will impact the community at many levels, and that almost all of these will in turn impact education and consequently the role of the District officer. For this reason, this section enumerates and explains the association of these impacts, checklists the issues, sets out a number of creative ideas and models for community support and frames the mechanics of meeting to facilitate such activity.

For example, the development of 'drop-in' centers to nourish and wash orphans, who will number over two million in South Africa alone by 2010 and constitute up to 20% of the total enrolment; or visiting programs for child-headed households, also set to explode in number.

It also emphasizes the manager's standing in the community and responsibility to see his role in a wider, social context and sets out a process to use the materials provided to mobilize community response. The key focus of this activity will be school governing bodies, churches, women's institutes and sports clubs, highlighting their potential role in a coordinated, community-wide response.

A Code of Conduct for Educators and Learners

A draft Code of Conduct for Educators and Learners will be developed for inclusion, based on various universal declarations of rights and responsibilities, and adapted for education - specifically, educators and learners. The intention would not be to indulge in moral pronouncements but identify educational, professional and human rights issues that should rightly be a point of departure in the classroom and school. If adopted, this could also serve as a point of reference for discussion, disciplinary or investigative action.

The Resource Kit will be created as a heavy-duty ring-bound volume, containing, in addition to its written content, master copies of modules and templates. The Kit will also be available in electronic format on both CD and Disk, as well as on various websites. We appreciate that many of the officials concerned do not currently have such access; however, their inclusion sends a clear message

regarding the professionalism and seriousness of the Kit, and caters for those who do have such access as well as those who will in the future.

It is anticipated that the pilot process will be complete early in 2001, and that the Resource Kit will thereafter be available to take to scale in those countries interested in participation.

A Mobile Task Force to Support HIV/AIDS Action Planning

The second initiative we would like to discuss, developed in close association with USAID, is the development of a Mobile Task Force of experts specialising in the impact of HIV/AIDS on education. It aims to respond to the fact that Ministries of Education across the continent are confronted with the need to develop practical, implementable plans and counter-measures to address the HIV/AIDS crisis confronting them, yet in some instances have limited information, experience, resources and specialist expertise to tackle the problem.

Regional and other workshops have helped to frame the scale of the crisis but do not deal adequately with the fact that these MOEs are in very different stages of development and have widely differing needs. Such workshops and related activities also ignore the fact that those attending may return to a Ministerial or departmental environment in which they may have little political or even peer support, and consequently be unable to take the response agenda forward. This initiative aims to vertically integrate the Workshopping and response process within the MOE concerned, binding all levels of management and decision-making to a common understanding of the way forward.

Objective

The objective of this USAID-supported initiative is to supplement the specialist human resource and skills capacity of MOEs on an 'as and when required' basis, to develop cohesive and implementable HIV/AIDS response planning at both strategic and practical levels, in order to empower the MOEs concerned to present these plans for national government funding and international donor consideration.

Goals and MTF Strategy

The Mobile Task Force (MTF) on HIV/AIDS Impact in Education will consist of a core team of education and other professionals specializing in complementary aspects of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the education sector, and with relevant experience in the field. The MTF will initially conceptualize and design a basket of common support activities for MOEs, to provide a basic schedule of activities and a point of departure for discussion. The availability of this group response will reduce duplication, and speed the development of templates and

standard approaches to common problems, while providing the combined capacity to consider answers to uncommon or more specific problems. The MTF will provide technical and other assistance *as required* to empower the MOE concerned to address and plan for the impact of HIV/AIDS on the sector and identify and prioritize specific areas of strategic intervention. This may entail the co-development and preparation of budgets, implementation schedules, templates, action plans and presentations, but in every instance the emphasis would be on the mentoring of this work rather than the assumption of it.

The MTF would identify and work with counterparts in the countries requesting assistance, with specific emphasis on the transfer of skills and experience. These counterparts should become local "Champions" for HIV/AIDS countermeasures, be identified as such within their MOEs and local environment, and be supported on a continuing basis. This support will include the establishment of an electronic hub to provide rapid response links and email/website back up, to create a network of involved practitioners.

The MTF would not supplant or compete with major sectoral audits or long-term strategic planning, but might well recommend such interventions and even assist in developing appropriate scopes of work for these. The very nature of the team's sponsored support confirms that this will be rapid reaction of comparatively short duration, designed to empower the MOEs in a large number of countries to take forward a structured and well considered response.

Areas of Operation

The MTF will be deployed in Southern and East African countries, and will work with counterparts in West Africa to facilitate the development of a similar Mobile Task Force in that region. Subject to expressions of interest and requests for assistance, USAID, through its missions in these regions, will agree the list of countries eligible for MTF assistance and will negotiate the timing of such support.

Regional Workshops

This MTF initiative may be combined with a schedule of internationally supported regional workshops, to bring groups of countries together to consider the wider implications of the pandemic and share experience and knowledge. MTF supported planning would be presented at such workshops, and be available for wider interrogation and use.

Too Little, Too Late?

In the context of the crisis, we must acknowledge that we have already lost the opening rounds, and consequently must manage the results while putting in place the counter-measures required to win in the longer term. The initiatives described above are a modest but practical attempt to move beyond swapping uncertain statistics, and initiate some pioneering work in a difficult field. We will learn a great deal from this, and together with the growing volume of research and enquiry, anticipate many valuable development lessons. These will be shared unreservedly and will lead to better and more effective management tools and practices.

Because, in the final analysis, it is a management problem: This is about solving practical problems in and around the classroom and bringing a measure of organization and normality to an environment which must be transformed from high-risk to low-risk status, before we can anticipate any success. Managers themselves, like their colleagues in the classrooms, are reeling from the enormity of the impact, psychologically and physically, and have become detached from the fact that the impact has to be systematically reduced through good management practice. It is time for us to see HIV/AIDS as a manageable threat in the context of education and other sectors, and not as a predator in isolation from the myriad issues that have long threatened the social, intellectual and economic life of the continent.

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