

**Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland – Ministry of Education. 2001. *Study on the Impact of the Schools HIV/AIDS Intervention programme in Swaziland.***

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In 1999 the Ministry of Education commissioned a study on the impact of HIV/AIDS in the education sector in Swaziland. Findings of that study demonstrated that HIV/AIDS was already a critical problem and its gravity was increasing rather than receding. It also showed that knowledge about HIV/AIDS was low even among teachers. It was recommended that the ministry should implement HIV/AIDS education in schools as a matter of urgency. In response to the recommendations of the study, ministries of education and health in collaboration with NGOs initiated the School HIV/AIDS Intervention Programme (henceforth SHIP). The aim of the programme was to disseminate HIV/AIDS education in all schools in the country.

By the time the present assessment of SHIP was carried out the programme had already covered 240 schools (henceforth pilot schools). The bulk of this report presents an assessment of the acceptability and effectiveness of HIV/AIDS education delivered under SHIP.

Results indicate that in pilot schools teachers and pupils are very receptive to HIV/AIDS education and they like the way the presentation of the material is done. They assert that the information is relevant and well explained. They said, what especially made the presentations interesting was that it provided them with new information and an opportunity for free discussions. Seeing HIV+ presenters reinforced the information given.

Both groups had prior knowledge of HIV/AIDS, which they had got from various sources. High in the list of sources were the radio, the TV, teachers and parents. Books and newspapers were low in the list and this is a cause for concern as pupils are expected to read.

The concept of life skills is new and was introduced by SHIP as part of the programme in pilot schools. Responses given showed that the information given has influenced their behaviour. Their skills in decision-making, assertiveness and coping with peer pressure have been enhanced. They also show that they have a high self-esteem/image if they can hold their heads high and attend a farewell function in "not the new dress" as expected by friends. They can also handle peer pressure if they can strongly say 'no' to sex without a condom or no to sex at all or other pressures like alcohol, smoking and drugs. Both pupils and teachers were able to identify a few Life Skills hence there is need to emphasise Life Skills Education in the programme. However, non-pilot schools were not very sure what life skills are especially in relation to HIV/AIDS.

Most of the respondents viewed SHIP as a very good programme because they gained a lot of knowledge on health, growth, positive living and HIV/AIDS. Presenters were free with everyone. However, they said the encounter was too brief. The respondents expressed clearly that they would like their siblings and friends to get the same information from the teams that were disseminating information.

Findings of the present study indicate that SHIP has initiated and/or influenced the process of behaviour change among pupils and teachers.

Examples of behaviour change among target groups were given as:

- > Abstain from sex
- > Avoid contact with blood and sharing of sharp instruments.
- > Avoid infection by using a condom in sexual encounters.
- > Improvement of life skills such as decision making, resistance to peer pressure and assertiveness.

Regarding the overall evaluation of the programme, responses show that the programme was appreciated by teachers and pupils. They would like to see it continue within schools, being sustained and having more frequent visits than just once. Respondents proposed that the MOE should play a more active role in the education about HIV/AIDS. These findings have clearly shown that this strategy is promising positive change among the school population and maybe even the community. An elaborate list of recommendations is presented below.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- > Since both pupils and teachers listen to the radio and watch TV the MOE should prepare more programmes to present information through the media.
  - > The MOE must train the teachers because they will ensure sustainability of the programme in the schools, since the research also proved that teachers are doing a lot of work in educating pupils about HIV/AIDS.
  - > The peer education or child-to-child strategy should be employed. Peer educators for each school should be trained to assist and provide the different kinds of information to pupils, especially on HIV/AIDS and Life skills.
  - > The MOE should visit the schools regularly to give support to teachers and to ensure that information is indeed getting through to pupils for continuity of the programme.
  - > There is need to develop a curriculum for schools to teach about HIV/AIDS, life skills, positive living, and other health issues. Meanwhile HIV/AIDS and life skills education, which has been integrated in the present curriculum should be strengthened, and teachers should be prepared to teach the concepts in schools.
  - > The collaboration effort is still necessary as in the responses, both children and teachers mentioned that the MOE should invite people from the different NGOs.
  - > There is need to develop teaching/learning and IEC material on HIV/AIDS, life skills and positive living and make it more user-friendly. Teachers and pupils will otherwise not use this information as the results of this study show lack of interest by both teachers and children in reading newspapers and extra curricula books.
  - > The MOE should provide enough personnel for counselling in the regions so that at least one officer can be available in office throughout the day.
  - > Out-of-school youth and parents should also be taught about HIV/AIDS, life skills and positive living so that they can help themselves and others. The communities also need this kind of education.
  - > Presenters should be helped to vary their teaching methods and use videos and films in addition to the lecture method to enrich their presentations.
  - > Since Information on HIV/AIDS, Life Skills and Positive Living was also shared with young siblings, this programme should start at pre-school level.
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