HIV/AIDS, Gender and Education

What is the impact of HIV/AIDS on education from a gender perspective?
The primary impact of HIV/AIDS on education is to exacerbate existing levels of dysfunction and make an already bad situation for women and girls worse (Badcock-Walters, Heard and Wilson 2002; Kelly 1999& 2000).   Monitoring the true extent of the impact has to be supported by gathering basic, gender sensitive data covering pupil entry, continuation and drop out rates; the rates of entry into teacher training and retention within the profession.

Currently HIV/AIDS:

▪ **Undermines the supply**: It is feared that up to 10% of teachers will be lost in the coming years both to death and sickness as well as to home-based care in the case of women teachers. In the worst hit countries in Africa this seriously jeopardizes their ability to reach the 2005 and 2015 Education For All Goals to eliminate gender inequalities in primary and secondary education and reach gender equality in education.

▪ **Undermines the demand**: The spread of HIV/AIDS is increasing the number of orphans[1] and the occurrence of child-headed households. In both cases this leads to pupils of both genders withdrawing from school because of inability to pay costs, the need to work on family land in the absence of other adults and/or social stigma. Girl students are frequently the first to be withdrawn in order to care for the sick and young, or may be taken out of schools and lured into commercial sex work.

▪ **Affects the quality of education**: HIV/AIDS impacts on the processes, contents and organizational aspects of education by putting parents, learners, educators and education providers under great stress. Trauma, crises, suffering, tension, despair etc will definitely enter the classroom and need to be dealt with in a positive way that ensures a conducive learning environment. However, in circumstances marked by the deterioration or absence of support systems, this can not be guaranteed and will have a negative impact on the quality of education. Existing gender inequalities in educational processes and contents due to, for example, poverty or stereotyped views of women's learning abilities and needs, are worsened. Girls are withdrawn early from school to care for others reinforcing attitudes that girls are more likely than boys to fail to complete, especially in secondary level.   This can have longer term damaging effect of the chances of girls students for selection at this stage. The presence of AIDS affected and infected teachers/educators and learners in the classroom challenges conventional learning processes, educational approaches and methods.   Class sizes are increased to cover for teachers who are sick; pupils who are poorly nourished find concentration hard and as HIV impacts on household income and poverty they will tend to attend erratically or not at all. High rates of absenteeism due to HIV/AIDS destabilize the learning environment and make consistency in the teaching of topics harder to achieve.

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[1] It is currently estimated that 90% of the 13,4 million world's AIDS orphans are living in Sub-saharan Africa (12,1 million).

- **Siphons off available resources**: HIV/AIDS diverts resources from the education sector at a time when education is incurring rising costs to replenish the number of teachers lost to AIDS, to promote new training related to HIV/AIDS and to meet the EFA Goals, two of which are explicitly related to gender equality. The risk is that the loss of national income and the rise of expenditures due to AIDS will be at the expense of painfully gained political commitments to fund gender equality action plans. The World Bank has estimated that in countries like Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia, paying for the direct and indirect consequences of HIV/AIDS will increase budget costs by more than 45% (UNESCO, 2002).

How to address HIV/AIDS through gender-responsive education ?

Any effort to tackle HIV/AIDS must in the process seek to end gender-based discrimination and violence, and to promote and protect women's and men's, boys' and girls', rights – notably their inalienable right to education[2] and to a healthy life. Education in its broadest sense, which covers in and out of school programmes and public education campaigns, has a major role to play in all of this by bringing about changes in attitudes and behaviors that are sustaining gender inequalities.

Formal and non-formal education, combined with other empowering measures used to fight against poverty, offers the potential for all children, youth and adults to gain increased knowledge, confidence and skills that will reduce their vulnerability to HIV. This is especially true for girls, young and adult women, if it is education promotes health and health seeking behaviours, is inclusive, gender-responsive and 'young people friendly'.

Both content and process are important and there is need to provide updated and relevant information in ways that are sensitive to the learning environment where gender stereotypes and attitudes within the establishment may mitigate against challenging gender norms. The major challenge of education is to supplement newly acquired knowledge with changes in attitudes and values that permit more appropriate decisions and action. Non-formal education approaches often used in literacy and basic education programmes have an essential role to play in this respect, especially in order to reach those that are not in schools such as the marginalized injecting drug users or the 862 million adult illiterates in the world, 2/3 of which are women and the high proportion of children with disability who are excluded from education.

Gender-responsive education programmes can establish conditions that render HIV transmission less likely and alleviate its disproportional impact on women and girls. Education does this by,

- Challenging and reducing gender inequality, which is one of the fundamental driving forces of the HIV/AIDS epidemic;
- Empowering women and men to claim and defend their rights, and to overcome stigma and discrimination;
- Increasing women's and men's propensity to access health services and to receive, understand, and act on public health messages;

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[2] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 and the Convention on the Eliminationof All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Article 10.

- Contributing to the promotion of national economic growth and personal poverty reduction;
- Improving overall health status through better nutritional knowledge and economic potential;
- Equipping women and men to insist upon accessible and good-quality health, education and social safety-net services;
- Promoting better understanding and practice in the areas of individual rights, relationships and responsibilities.

To be effective, education programmes must be gender-responsive and address a key set of issues:

- Understanding the nature of the infection and countering myths and misconceptions that weigh on women and men;
- Understanding how gender biases influences sexual behaviours and increases peoples vulnerability to HIV/AIDS;
- Knowing what behaviours women and men should respectively avoid and knowing which ones to adopt in order to reduce risk;
- Adopting attitudes of respect for women's and men's human rights and dignity;
- Understanding the nature and dynamics of gender relations; including the taboos and gender stereotypes that affect these dynamics;
- Developing skills for putting into practice understanding, compassion and knowledge.

The education sector as a workplace

Schools and education establishments are workplaces, like any other workplace, that need to ensure the safety of their staff, learners and patrons, be they male or female. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Research in Zimbabwe, for example, found that abuse of girls in coeducational schools was widespread and took the form of aggressive sexual behavior, intimidation and physical assault by older boys. Girls in single sex schools were not protected from sexual advances outside the school. In addition, there are instances of male teachers making unwarranted and aggressive sexual advances to both male and female students. Pregnancy is a frequent cause of non-completion of education. In South Africa, approximately one in 200 South African women aged 15 to 49 were raped by a school teacher before the age of 15 (Yewkes, 2002). Schools and learning institutions are not inherently different from wider society in terms of unequal power-relations and the gender expectations of girls – girls are less likely to complete a full and higher education; they are less likely to be found in positions of responsibility and management; positive role models for girl students are relatively few.

Even well designed and implemented HIV/AIDS education programmes can be thwarted by the overall gender-discriminatory environment in which they are conducted. Data from a study of 21 schools in Uganda describes how elements of an AIDS Education curriculum to address gender related power disparities are concurrently undermined by the gender norms operating in the school environment (girls do not participate actively in class; girls are policed more actively 'for their own safety' fostering a sheltered role for girls and greater freedom with power for boys; girls are caricatured as tempting boys and male teachers etc.)

Codes of practice, which are compliant with the <u>ILO's Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work</u> should be adopted. Ministries of Education should promote inclusive education removing the gender barriers that mitigate against equal rates of access and equal rates of success between boys and girls within the education system. Systems of teaching that allow male domination in class; the lack of female teacher role models; and the sometimes threatening environment where girls are policed whilst boys allowed to remain aggressive within co-ed schools must be consciously discouraged. Head teachers and others running education establishments should not allow discrimination within the workplace towards people who may be affected by HIV within their family and therefore subject to stigma and rejection by peers.

International Policy Commitments

- The *Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, (Article 10 h). http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/index.html
- The *Convention Against Discrimination in Education*, adopted in 1960, http://www.unesco.org/human_rights/index.htm
- The *Dakar Framework for Action for Education for All* (2002) – http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/index.shtml
- The *UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* – http://www.un.org/ga/aids/coverage/FinalDeclarationHIVAIDS.htm

What needs to be done ?

Mainstreaming gender in the education system is key to promoting gender equality, which is a critical factor in reducing vulnerability to HIV, discouraging high-risk behavior, and mitigating its impact. Mainstreaming gender means considering the impact of gender norms on a given issue and dealing with these in an integrated and inclusive way. Gender affects education in terms of who accesses education (women, girls and special needs groups e.g. blind students are often denied access); who delivers it (the extent of a patriarchal leadership model within the school structures); and how it brings about change in the learner's life (girls who leave education early to motherhood or marriage are often denied the value added accruing to education by virtue of applying knowledge acquired).

Mainstreaming gender in the education system means:

1. Conducting thorough gender-sensitive situational analyses prior to developing educational strategies; understand the gender dynamics that are at play in any given environment before attempting to work within this specific context.
2. Making sure that educational strategies to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate its impact are part and parcel of HIV/AIDS national action plans, Education for All National Plans, and national agendas in favour of gender equality and empowerment; this is an argument for coherence in policy and strategies.
3. Training educators, teachers, educational administrators, planners and facilitators in gender-issues and their links to HIV/AIDS. Educators, teachers, school administrators and parents, often themselves find it useful to participate in group discussions about these issues. Before teachers feel comfortable discussing these issues with students,

they often require training in participatory and learner-centred approaches, which allow them to discuss their own knowledge, feelings and beliefs about these issues.

4. Revising or developing educational contents so that their messages are customized to meet local needs; are designed to be non-sexist and address sexist practices; to take into account cultural differences; and are meaningful to the targeted age group. A promising approach in this area is to address issues of gender as a cross-cutting theme in learning and teaching material, whether it be for non-formal literacy training or formal academic subjects.

5. Lobbying for the promotion and protection of the rights of learners and teachers affected by or living with AIDS.

6. Revising delivery strategies to better meet the respective needs of girls and boys, young and adult women and men, especially those who have been orphaned by the disease or are in other ways heavily affected by its consequences.

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- ILO's Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work.
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Useful links:

- UNAIDS – Gender and HIV fact sheets: www.unaids.org/fact_sheets
- Education for All (EFA) website: http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/index.shtml
- UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP): www.unesco.org.iiep
- UNESCO HIV/AIDS Clearing House on the impact of HIV/AIDS on education - http://iiep.tomoye.com/ev.php
- The Global Content Bank, an International Clearinghouse on Curriculum for HIV/AIDS Prevention: http://www.unesco.org/education/ibe/ichae/
- Database of curricular material for HIV/AIDS education: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/Aids/aidshome.htm
- ILO - www.ilo.org
- UNICEF - http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/index.htm
- UNICEF - http://www.unicef.org/
- Education International In School health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Programme: http://ei-ie.org/educ/aids/eeintro.htm
- Education and Development Center: http://main.edc.org/
- PANOS HIV/AIDS programme : http://www.panos.org.uk/global/program_news.asp?ID=1001
- United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012: http://www.unesco.org/education/litdecade/