

ADDRESS HIV/AIDS RELATED PROBLEMS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Introduction

The statistics on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the education sector are very sketchy. Discussion with Head teachers and other personnel in the education sector however suggest that the problem is quite significant. The impact of HIV/AIDS in Malawi was infrequently referred to by key stakeholders during a present mission. Further, when enquiries about possible actions, necessary resources or available programs to increase awareness of the pandemic were directed to relevant personnel, the responses did not suggest much disquiet.

Recent statistics from the Malawi National Human Development Report (2001) indicate that Malawian life expectancy has declined between '90 and '99 from an average 48 years to approximately 40 years - mainly because of the impact of the epidemic. Further, the report indicates that Malawi has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world - currently reported to be as high as 35.5% in some regions. At sectoral level, this prevalence is exerting untold disruption. For example, it is estimated that over 80% of female teachers absent themselves from classes at least once a month because of factors associated with the illness. As such, the growing epidemic is reducing overall education capacity because of frequent illnesses and deaths. It is also beginning to restrict overall demand for education as children become orphans, or heads of households, and are forced to assume full responsibility in caring for chronically ill parents.

A recent visit to a primary school revealed that between 7 and 10 teachers out of 51 (between 14% and 20%) are absent daily as a result of HIV/AIDS related illnesses. The impact of such absence is that students of the absent teachers have to be shared among the teachers who are present. It is noted that in the school class sizes ranged from 50 to 100. Sharing students of absent teacher exacerbates what is already crowded classroom situation and it is doubtful whether any effective learning and teaching goes on.

During visits to teacher training colleges, authorities appeared ill at ease when questioned about the danger of HIV/AIDS infection for the large number of male and female students living on campus. In addition, it was noted that there was little, if any, literature available in college libraries to help students learn more about preventive measures. .

Statistics on HIV/AIDS among teachers are not readily available, but it can be assumed that there is tremendous loss of teachers through this disease. The loss in terms of investment in the training of these teachers is phenomenal. Hence there is a need to examine ways of reducing infection among teachers and ensuring that those affected are able to access treatment in order to keep them in class for as long as possible.

Teachers are not the only ones who are being affected by the disease. A recent visit to a Division in the Mzuzu revealed that the 50% of the blood that had been donated by secondary school students following a serious bus accident could not be used because it was tainted. This reveals that the disease is not only affecting teachers but students as

well. Again statistics are not available, but if these examples given by these visits are anything to go by, the problems is quite serious and needs to be addressed.

The recent baseline study carried on SEP indicated that teachers were not comfortable with teaching the topic of HIV/AIDS. If we believe that education is one sure way of conquering the spread of HIV/AIDS this finding creates a problem in curbing the problem. The problem is so acute that Education personnel who were targeted for Component 3 of SEP, Strengthening School Based Management through the training of methods advisors, deputy heads and new heads and Heads of Departments had found the Module on HIV/AIDS difficult to cope with and were uncomfortable with subject leading to the report recommending that “the prevalent effect of HIV/AIDS in Malawian society today points to the need for further awareness training to change teachers attitudes”. It goes to say “ Teachers are the change agents that can, though their positive influence at school level make a substantial impact to stem the spread of the virus.” This can only happen when the teachers are comfortable with teaching the subject.

There is also evidence that some teachers are in the habit to proposing to girl students and could be responsible to the spread of the virus among young, leading to the observation that “Women are contracting the AIDS younger than man and at a higher prevalence rate(four to six times more in the 15-29 age group).”

On the positive side, the recent Joint Review of the Malawi Education Sector strongly advocates that the taboo surrounding the issue of HIV and AIDS be confronted and that preventative measures become a central concern in all emerging education programs.

The Way Forward

The development of Malawi is going to a large extent on education. Hence to need to ensure that the disease does not have a disastrous effect on all education personnel and students. There is need therefore need to ensure the following.

1. Improving the attitudes of teachers towards the teaching of HIV/AIDS related topics in the school system. There may be need to revise the modules to make them more user friendly in order to encourage teachers to use them.
2. Changing their professional attitudes towards girl students.
3. Using some of the traditional methods and systems that are place for imparting information about sexuality and the virus and the way it spread. Positive aspects of initiation ceremonies and practices need to be exploited in order to spread to message.
4. Targeting infecting teachers and students in order to keep them in the classroom for as long as possible through the provision of medication and counseling.
5. Making testing free for teachers and easily available. Provision of medication should encourage them to come forward for testing and knowing their status.
6. Teachers who are infected should be encouraged to form an association (TLWA) through which special attention and counseling can be channeled. The possibility of forming a similar association for students (SLWA) should also be explored for purposes of targeting.

7. There is need to gather information and data on the levels of HIV/AIDS, opportunistic infections among teachers and students for monitoring purposes This is crucial for tackling the problem.

Application of the Relevant Development Objectives of MAP

The interventions being proposed for combating the spread of HIV/AIDS among teachers, students and key education personnel have to be in line with the Dos set in the MAP PCD. These are summarized in the table below:

OUTCOME/IMPACT INDICATOR	PROPOSED ACTION
a) By 2007, the proportion of adults (15-49) possessing accurate knowledge of HIV prevention will increase.	The age group affect mostly students in secondary and tertiary education levels, and the teachers. Special education programs need to be targeted for them, given the difficulties already highlighted, about the teaching of sex education and HIV/AIDS in the secondary schools. There will be need to develop user friendly modules and approaches in the teaching about this topic.
b) By 2007, the proportion of adults (15-49) who have reduced sexual partners will increase.	The age groups affect mostly students in secondary and tertiary education and teachers. Teachers will need to be discouraged from proposing to students. The Ministry should set up ways of disciplining offending teachers. The deployment of teachers should aim, as far as possible at keeping the families together, to reduce temptation among teacher to indulge in extra-marital relationships.
c) By 2007, the median age of first sex among young women (15-24) will increase	The age groups includes students in secondary and tertiary levels. Teachers need to be discouraged from proposing to girl students. Poverty issues among vulnerable girls need to be addressed. Orphans, because of deprivation can easily be sexually exploited for food, shelter etc. It will be necessary to adopt traditional methods and system, initiation ceremonies to emphasize the girls the need to delay sexual activities. TOTO Clubs should be encouraged and strengthened in schools. Role models need to be identified so that they can address students on various aspects on the disease. Effort should also be made to identify persons whom the

	target population respects and from whom it is willing to receive information. These should include PLWA. Infected prominent persons should be encouraged to participate in such addresses.
d) By 2007 the proportion of 15-19 year olds who are sexually active will decrease (by sex)	Same as above
e) Drop out rate of orphaned and street children from primary school is reduced	Traditional leaders should mobilize their communities to take collective responsibility for orphans in their midst, because the traditional extended family system is collapsing with the death of the able bodied, leaving the old and sick to look after orphans. School feeding programs should also target the children at risk. Orphans with the virus should have easy access to drugs and medical care.
f) Proportion of households receiving assistance to care for orphans and chronically ill adults increased.	Families of infected teachers and students should be deliberately targeted in order to keep the teachers and students in class.
g) Proportion of HIV infected individuals with opportunistic infections treated according to standard guidelines increase	There should be a deliberate action to target teachers. The need for early identification and diagnosis of these infections is critical. Therefore there is need to increase medical and testing facilities. Testing should be free and easily available. This could include mobile facilities to outlying areas.
h) Average years of life following and HIV diagnosis increases.	This is the ideal situation where infected teachers and students are able to live a normal and productive life. This will strengthen the education system for the development of Malawi.
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PROCESS INDICATORS	PROPOSED ACTION
a) Proportion of CBO submitted subprojects increases	CBOs should work together with teacher groups in working on the subprojects
b) Proportion of PLWA association submitted projects increases	The teacher organization and the Teaching Service Commission should encourage teachers living with AIDS (TLWA) to form their own association which will work the other associations, in project preparation for submission for funding. The possibility

	of an organization of students living with AIDS (SLWA) should also be explored especially at the tertiary level using student organizations
c) Funding received by umbrella organizations on behalf of smaller CSOs increases	The teacher organization TLWA should work with other CSOs in order to benefit from funding
d) By 2007, number of districts implementing HIV/AIDS work plans increases	The plans should include interventions directly targeting teachers and infected students
e) By 2007 number of Ministries incorporating HIV/AIDS prevention activities in their annual plans and budgets increases	The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should be among the first to come up with such plans and budgets because of the need to keep infected teachers and students in the classroom
f) Funding to civil society/private sector for the national response increases	The same should apply to TLWA and SLWA
g) National response tracked and good practices disseminated	TLWA and SLWA should participate in the tracking and dissemination of good practices. They should take the lead in this endeavor because of the centrality of education to information and knowledge dissemination.