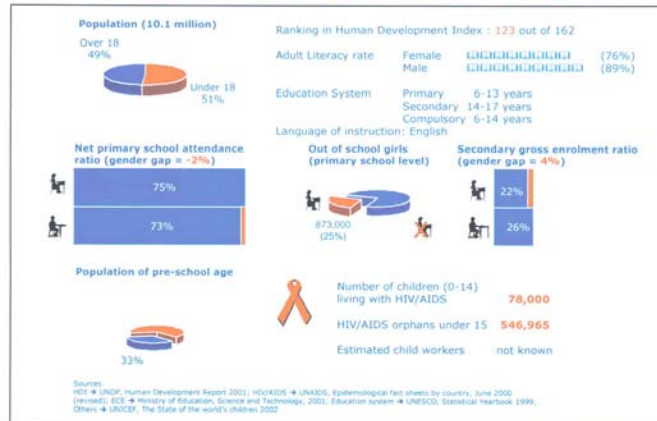


HIV/AIDS AND GIRLS' EDUCATION

The FAWE Kenya Experience

GIRLS' EDUCATION: KENYA AT A GLANCE



FAWE Kenya (FAWEK) chose to work in Thika District because of its high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate. In 2001, Thika was the leading district in Kenya in HIV/AIDS infection, with 37% of its residents infected. Furthermore, FAWEK learnt that 17% of primary school kids and 22% of secondary pupils were infected.

HIV/AIDS in Kenya – End 1999

- ✘ Approximately 1.5 million people have already died of AIDS.
- ✘ Currently, one out of every eight adults in rural areas is infected.
- ✘ In urban areas, nearly one out of every five adults is infected.
- ✘ It is estimated that 2.2 million Kenyans are now living with HIV infection.
- ✘ An estimated 200,000 Kenyans develop AIDS each year.
- ✘ Young women in the age groups 15–19 and 20–24 are more than twice as likely to be infected as males in the same age group.
- ✘ About 10% of reported cases occur in children under five years of age.
- ✘ The low incidence of AIDS cases in the 5–14 age group makes this group an important target for AIDS prevention programmes.

Source: *AIDS in Kenya*, Ministry of Health, Sixth edition (2001).

THE THIKA HIV/AIDS PROJECT

FAWEK targeted primary school children in their early adolescent years (10--13 years) with the goal of establishing peer counselling clubs. The clubs would provide an avenue for young boys and girls to acquire basic knowledge, skills and attitudes on adolescent sexuality, reproductive health issues and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) including HIV/AIDS. The project therefore targeted upper primary classes so as to emphasize abstinence, learning to say **No** to sex, the key route of HIV/AIDS transmission.

Training For Headteachers and Teacher Counsellors

A training workshop was organized for 64 teachers, two each from the 32 targeted primary schools. The two teachers subsequently served as patrons of the peer counselling clubs in their schools and provide guidance and counselling services. Through a highly participatory workshop, the teachers were equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes in HIV/AIDS counselling and were presented with a lot of resource material for use in their schools.

Training for Peer Counsellors

Sixty-four pupils, a girl and boy from each of the 32 schools, accompanied by one teacher, participated in a two-day workshop. The teacher subsequently served as the chief patron of the peer counselling clubs and the pupils as leaders of the clubs. An exhibition on HIV/AIDS, a video film **Bush Fire** and student presentations of poems and skits with HIV/AIDS messages supplemented the training.

IMPACT

The 64 girls and boys trained as peer counsellors together with their teachers are now creating awareness on HIV/AIDS on a larger scale, starting at their schools. They use songs, poems, drama, debate and talk shows, as well as counselling services. Each of the 32 schools has an average of 250 girls. The project has therefore reached about 8,000 girls and 800 teachers.

The peer counsellors are given time during school assemblies and parents' meetings to make their presentations. The impact is being felt beyond the schools and messages are now being transmitted in churches, market places and through community gatherings.

Girls trained:

- ✂ Are more assertive.
- ✂ Have confidence and high levels of self-esteem.
- ✂ Have learnt about adolescent sexuality and reproductive health issues.
- ✂ Now know that they are more vulnerable than boys to contracting HIV/AIDS.
- ✂ Have gained leadership and counselling skills that they are using in organizing the HIV/AIDS peer counseling clubs and in educating other pupils.
- ✂ Are establishing support groups in their schools.

POTENTIAL FOR REPLICATION

The Thika HIV/AIDS intervention was a small pilot project with a short life span, July to December 2002. The activities of these clubs are keeping HIV/AIDS messages alive in the schools. Since this project is easily replicable and is also cost effective because most of the required resources are within the school, it is hoped that this pioneering group will continue to help other schools in the municipality to establish similar clubs.

GIRLS' VOICES

- ✂ "I will counsel pupils so that they can change their behaviour."
- ✂ "I will say 'No' to early sex."
- ✂ "I will not be a victim of AIDS."
- ✂ "I will stop grouping with friends of bad behaviour."
- ✂ "I will refuse to be given lifts by strangers who may end up giving me AIDS."
- ✂ "I will tell my friends to stop prostitution."
- ✂ "Pupils in primary schools are suffering from AIDS because they do not have someone to explain to them issues about HIV/AIDS. They therefore engage in early sex before marriage."
- ✂ "When pornographic material appears on television and children are watching, we should immediately switch off the TV or change the channel and hide the remote control."

The Scourge

When death came
And took away our parents
We were left with no hope
Wondering who could be next on line?
Friends, relatives abandoned us
Now we live on garbage food.

We used to laugh at them
Today it is us
Tomorrow it might be you
Who, who will sing for us a comforting song.

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