



HIV/AIDS: responding to the education challenge

Don Bundy, Alexandra Draxler, Gillian Holmes, Amaya Gillespie, David Clarke and Lesley Drake

Summary

The UNAIDS Interagency Task Team (IATT) for Education is working with countries in Africa to help accelerate the education sector response to HIV/AIDS as an essential contribution to achieving EFA goals. The IATT is convened by UNESCO and the membership currently includes representatives of UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, WHO, World Bank, ILO, USAID, DFID, EC, Education International, the Partnership for Child Development, the UNAIDS Secretariat and experts from affected countries. This joint programme provides a forum for countries to share experiences of responding to HIV/AIDS, with the twin goals of mitigating the impact of the disease on the education sector, and preventing infection in students and teachers.

Background

HIV/AIDS is devastating the education sectors of the worst affected countries in Africa (World Bank, 2002). Teachers are dying in numbers that challenge the capacity of training programmes to replace them. Teachers are chronically absent from schools, especially in rural areas where their numbers were already limited. The death or sickness of parents means that increasing numbers of children now lack the resources to enrol or stay in school. Yet it is also clear that education ranks among the most effective – and cost-effective – means of HIV prevention. It is a cruel paradox that school-age children have the lowest rate of infection of any age group, and that HIV/AIDS is destroying the ability of countries to deliver the ‘social vaccine’ that can give them the chance of a life free of AIDS.

To respond to this sectoral challenge, the UNAIDS IATT has developed a strategy for HIV/AIDS and education

(UNESCO, 2002). The strategy recognises that EFA goals, as well as the Millennium Development Goals of achieving universal primary education (Goal 2) and gender equity in access to education (Goal 3) may not be achieved in many countries because of HIV/AIDS. The strategy also recognises that in many cases the limitation on action is not the lack of resources, but the lack – or limited implementation – of a coherent education sector strategy to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Whilst there may be a high awareness of the importance of AIDS generally, there is often uncertainty in the education sector about the types of effective action it can take regarding impact management and prevention. Perhaps partly because of this uncertainty, the extensive external resources for multi-sectoral responses to AIDS in Africa – more than a billion dollars have been made available to some 24 countries over the last 18 months through the World Bank’s Multi-Country AIDS Programme (MAP) and bilateral organisations – are currently under-utilised by the education sector in particular.

The impact of AIDS on education systems makes it even more imperative that countries redouble efforts to develop more effective planning and management systems, as well as improve the quality of education. This challenge provides the education sector with a context in which to implement reforms that could have far reaching benefits for education access and quality, as well as the opportunity to mitigate the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on schoolchildren, their parents and their teachers.

From strategy to action

HIV/AIDS-affected countries have worked with the UNAIDS partners to develop a plan of action to opera-





tionalise the IATT strategy in Africa. The plan calls for a multi-partner effort from the countries, the UN system, bilateral donors, NGOs and the private sector at three levels:

- Advocacy at the ministerial level to promote understanding and political will. UNESCO and other partners are supporting efforts by key policy-formers to refine their national strategic responses. For example, by providing technical input to the African Ministers of Education (MINEDAFVIII) meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (December, 2002) and by providing policy support for the strengthening of HIV/AIDS responses in national EFA plans.
- Sharing of experience among countries and capacity building through facilitated seminars to promote understanding of feasible actions. These activities include sharing of experiences among key education sector stakeholders from affected countries, through sub-regional seminars, followed by the strengthening of a national response, led by the stakeholder team.
- Support at the country level for the education sector to develop and implement an effective response. The participating agencies in the UNAIDS IATT partnership will provide support to strengthen the national response. The source of this support will vary depending upon local circumstances but includes: World Bank task teams, the World Bank Institute training programme and the Norwegian Education Trust Fund; UNICEF country and regional offices; UNESCO country and regional offices; UNAIDS theme groups; bilateral agency technical assistance from DFID, IrelandAID and others, the USAID-supported Mobile Task Team (MTT), and the DFID-supported Partnership for Child Development (PCD).

The work plan is being implemented by a multi-agency partnership, developed under the umbrella of the UNAIDS IATT. Implementation and monitoring of the plan of action will be managed by a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of participating agencies, and convened by UNESCO. The World Bank is taking the lead in coordinating the training activities.

A sub-regional seminar to share experiences

The first activity is a seminar co-hosted by the Government of Kenya, the World Bank and UNICEF (Mombasa, November, 2002), involving participants from Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Zambia and Tanzania. The 5-day seminar brings together country teams from the education and health sectors, the agencies concerned with the support of

orphans and vulnerable children, civil society, the teacher unions and the national HIV/AIDS commissions.

In developing this seminar the following guiding principles were adopted:

- All countries already have plans for an education response to HIV/AIDS and have actions underway. Thus the seminar should start from what is already there, and aim to enrich, strengthen and improve quality, without constraining current actions.
- The responses of different countries are at different stages of programme development and implementation. Thus the seminar should ensure that training inputs are relevant both to countries seeking to start programmes and those seeking to improve existing programmes.
- The epidemic is at different stages in different countries. Thus the training inputs must be relevant to both early (e.g. projection of future impact) and advanced (e.g. sectoral mitigation, orphans and vulnerable children) stages of the epidemic.
- Countries have different experiences and different levels of expertise. Thus the seminar must ensure that countries can learn from each other, by providing opportunities for sharing experiences between country teams, and for experts from one country to work with others.
- Experiences from countries which are not represented at the seminar are also relevant. Thus the seminar must provide access to information on experiences and programmes elsewhere.

The overall design of the seminar provides a focus on group work at the country level, with strong facilitation for each group, and strong technical inputs that aim to meet country-specific needs for expertise.

Technical focus and content of the facilitation materials

A major aim of the seminar is to ensure that countries have access to current information on promising practices in some of the key aspects of the education sector response. The topics to be covered include the following:

- Tools to project the impact of HIV/AIDS on education sector supply and demand. Of particular importance to countries at an early stage in the epidemic are methods of predicting how the epidemic is likely to affect the mortality and morbidity of teachers, the number of school-age children and the number of orphans and vulnerable children who may require financial support to attend school. These tools are intended to help the education sector recognise the actual or potential impact



of HIV/AIDS on teachers and education costs and quality, and to recognise the direct relevance of HIV/AIDS to the education sector.

- Mitigating the impact on supply of education. Based on the analyses of impact, there is a need to develop sectoral mitigation responses to teacher illness, absenteeism and death. Examples of responses by countries include changes in teacher development or recruitment procedures, changes in budget allocations, additional output from teacher training institutions, temporary replacement when teachers are sick, and the use of innovative approaches, such as distance education, to deliver education when traditional approaches are constrained.
- Ensuring education access for orphans and vulnerable children. In addition to the impacts on supply, HIV/AIDS can affect the demand for education by causing the death or illness of parents. When parental support is withdrawn, there is a significant risk that children will drop out or fail to enrol in school. Promising responses include fostering in the community, as well as subsidies, fee waivers or fee abatement as means of ensuring education access.
- HIV prevention and peer counselling. A major role for the education sector is to help children and teachers to gain the values and skills that will help them avoid risky behaviours. A number of tools are available which help education planners and curriculum developers to use skills based approaches to include HIV/AIDS information and prevention messages in school curricula at different grade levels. In addition, an 'HIV/AIDS prevention in schools sourcebook' has been developed by the UNAIDS IATT partners, with IrelandAID support, to provide summaries of promising programmes, benchmarked against IATT standards.

Developing a regional response

Implementation of the plan of action will begin with the sub-regional seminar in East Africa. Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo have already participated in a sub-regional training (with the World Bank, UNESCO/IIEP, PCD, DFID, and UNICEF).

Discussions have begun with other countries to identify sub-regional groupings for future seminars, based on language, and geographical and political factors. Some plans have already been made:

- Nigeria has proposed that the seminar approach is used to bring together representatives from the education

sector at the state level in order to further develop the state plans for achieving universal basic education, and to incorporate an effective response to HIV/AIDS. Five states have already worked with DFID and the World Bank. The aim is to expand this number initially to cover all 16 states that are receiving external support for universal basic education, and to work with local planning institutions so that they can extend training progressively to all the states. A seminar is planned for March 2003.

- Ghana, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia have already worked on AIDS and education as part of the ECOWAS regional initiative supported by UNESCO at the Elmina workshop, and form an Anglophone grouping in West Africa. A seminar is planned for April 2003.
- Burundi, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, Uganda and Tanzania form a geopolitical 'Great Lakes' grouping, with considerable cross-border migration. A seminar is planned for June 2003.

The overall aim is to ensure that all countries in Africa have the opportunity to participate in this initiative.

Don Bundy, HIV/AIDS and Education Focal Point,
Human Development Division, World Bank, Washington
DC, USA. Email: dbundy@worldbank.org

Alexandra Draxler, Coordinator, UNAIDS Interagency
Task Team on Education, UNESCO, Paris, France.

Gillian Holmes, Chief, Programme Development,
UNAIDS Secretariat, Geneva, Switzerland.

Amaya Gillespie, Senior Advisor, HIV/AIDS and
Education, UNICEF, New York, USA.

David Clarke, Education Department, Department for
International Development, London, UK.

Lesley Drake, Coordinator, Partnership for Child
Development, Imperial College, London, UK.

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