



Mainstreaming HIV within an Education Programme – a case study from Concern Mozambique



‘An education system which does not protect itself against the potential and actual ravages of HIV/ AIDS will not be able to serve as a vehicle for reducing the incidence of the disease. The system that is meant to offer protection is itself in need of protection.’ (Coombe and Kelly 2002)

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Background

Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 168 of 177 in the 2005 Human Development Index with over half of all Mozambicans living below the poverty line. The Mozambique government sees education as an opportunity for people to move out of poverty and has committed to universal access to primary education. The government's education sector has made significant progress in increasing access and quality of primary education throughout the country and reducing gender inequality. However, the AIDS epidemic is seriously challenging these achievements.

1.2 million of a population of 18 million people are infected with HIV⁴. Teachers, parents, community leaders, children have all been touched by the epidemic and its impact is felt everywhere leading to a dangerous cycle of increased poverty. Children are particularly feeling the brunt of AIDS. There are approximately 1.5 million orphans in Mozambique, a third of whom lost their parent/s to AIDS. All children deserve the right to an education. But this right is particularly difficult for orphans to realize. Children at young ages stay away from school to care for their sick parents, while watching them die. The trauma of witnessing the death of their parents, and then finding themselves without family ties makes returning to school a challenge and some orphans describe discrimination within substitute families leading them to have to abandon school altogether.

Education is central to combating HIV, a condition for which there is not yet a cure. Where children are not infected, education can provide information and skills to strengthen their capacity to prevent HIV infection and to reduce stigma and discrimination⁵. For those infected by HIV, education can strengthen their ability to cope and promote a caring environment.

This case study is based on in-depth qualitative research⁵ conducted over six months by Concern Worldwide in the central province of Manica. It looks at how Concern Mozambique has addressed issues related to HIV and AIDS within its education programme. Specifically it outlines how School Councils can help create a safer and more supportive environment particularly for girls using a methodology called Circles of Support. Circles of Support encourages the broad community to take responsibility for ensuring all children attend school, children are free from abuse

⁴ UNAIDS: Mozambique Country profile: 2003

⁵ Heuberger R: Concern Mozambique "Investigating Circles of Support": Jan 2006

(sexual or other) in school, and provides specific support to the most vulnerable children including orphans because of AIDS.

1 HIV mainstreaming in an education programme

Concern has been working with schools in partnership with The Ministry of Education at district level and two key partner organizations: Magariro and ANDA. Working within government-defined policies, the overall objectives of the education programmes are to improve access to and quality of education in Manica and Zambezia provinces. The intended impact is to improve the lives of poor children, especially vulnerable children, through education and to enable their development into self-reliant, active citizens. The focus has been to: improve school infrastructure; build the capacity of school councils; promote all children's right to education, particularly girls; improve the technical quality of education⁶ and support literacy and adult education.

By 2002, it was clear to staff on the ground that not including an HIV perspective would jeopardize Concern's ability to reach its' education goals, because "the high prevalence of HIV and consequential impact of AIDS make it impossible to work effectively in any area of development without taking it into account". Concern Mozambique believed that its education programme must protect all children from the impact of the HIV virus, and address the specific needs of orphans. In order to achieve this, it looked at strengthening and broadening its work with School Councils.

Concern Mozambique had already identified School Councils as key in ensuring schools delivered quality education to all as mandated by government. They are elected bodies make up of a cross-section of the community: school administration, teachers, community representatives, parents and pupils. Half the Council must be female and its size is based on the number of pupils in the school. Guidance and definitions of roles and responsibilities of School Councils are provided by the Ministry of Education. Many were already interpreting their role to provide a safer and more supportive environment to specifically include HIV affected children:

'a mother and father died of AIDS and their children had nowhere to stay. They sat with us and we thought about getting the children to stay at the centre (the boarding house) at least to complete those days they remained at school. All these things have

⁶ Zones of Pedagogical influence (ZIP) are resource centres that serve a group of 8-10 schools with both teaching materials and human resources to enable teachers to understand their responsibility as educators and to implement better teaching

been organised by the School Council' (School Councils member, EPC Mungari, Guro, Manica Province, October 2005)

And as members of the community, they are in a unique position to know which children are or are not able to access education and effect change at school level.

Concern along with its key partners ANDA and Magariro recognized that School Councils could potentially be a powerful mechanism for strengthening supportive networks and structures to help ensure children realize their right to a quality education, including those who are HIV+ or orphans. Circles of Support was the methodology to ensure School Councils could achieve their potential.

1.1 Circles of Support

Circles of Support is a flexible model that works through existing structures such as School Councils to establish systems of support, directly or through links with other actors, in relation to HIV/AIDS and its impact. It is based on the belief that schools can be a catalyst for creating supportive and protective environments and play a key role in networks of support for children within the wider community. First named by Michael Kelly in Zambia, and further developed by IBIS in Namibia, it was introduced into Mozambique by IBIS and Concern in 2004.⁷

THE CONCEPT

- Children need many forms of protection and support that cannot be provided by a single source.
- Communities have resources and networks that can be strengthened to help all children to realise these forms of support.
- Schools have the potential to be an important partner to protect children.

THE VISION

- To ensure that schools are a safe environment for all children living in the context of HIV and AIDS – this is achieved both with help from within the school and in the communities.

SHIFTS NEEDED WITHIN SCHOOLS

- School Councils focus on schools being a place of safety, particularly from sexual exploitation
- Education needs to look at schools as being a place of "learning" as well as "teaching"
- School Councils need to look at retaining pupils and reaching children out of school
- HIV prevention and education programmes need to be included in the school curriculum

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- To focus on creating systems and networks that capture HIV infected or affected children without identifying individuals as this may lead to stigmatisation.
- To strive to protect children from risk, particularly HIV infection, through sexual exploitation.
- To work within existing structures.

⁷ www.ibis.dk

1.2 Putting Circles of Support into Practise

During a series of meetings and workshops, Concern, Magariro and ANDA, in collaboration with the District Education boards, worked with School Councils to apply the Circles of Support concepts in three main phases:

PHASE ONE – Support the establishment of School Councils and provide HIV information

Concern works School Councils to help them establish their composition. Using Government guidelines, Councils are organised to ensure that all groups were fairly represented, ensuring they include a gender balance and members of more marginalised groups. Then, using participatory ‘research’ tools, School Councils get to grips with community issues and their responses to HIV and AIDS.



PHASE TWO – Work out school development plans which include HIV and orphans and vulnerable children.

During a workshop Concern works with School Councils to draw up a three-year strategic plan for short term and longer-term interventions. School Councils are encouraged to identify community initiatives and networks that already provide support to orphans so that these can be included in their plans. At the end of the workshop an action plan is drawn up that determines initiatives that the School Councils then manage.

PHASE THREE – aims to provide support for combined school/community HIV and OVC initiatives and networks for protection of vulnerable children.

School Councils are in a good position to identify children in greatest need. Concern encourages them to link vulnerable children with government and non-governmental agencies, and networks. For example, school-feeding programmes sponsored by the World Food Programme (WFP), or Department of Social Welfare that can provide additional material support.

In some schools, micro-projects are identified that specifically address the needs of orphans within the schools. These projects can range from small income-generating activities to HIV sensitisation sessions in communities⁸. Concern has supported a number of these both financially and with technical support, but others are funded by the communities themselves or by external donors.

The three phases were initially followed as a blueprint, but it became evident during a monitoring visit that the “one size fits all” approach needed to become more flexible. Some School Councils are already strong in terms of composition but need tangible support in learning how best to interpret and implement their role. Other School Councils were weaker, needing longer term capacity building support to help them interpret government guidelines. So, the phases are now implemented as a guidance with support being tailored to the specific needs of the School Council.

2 Impact of Mainstreaming HIV using Circles of Support

Applying the principles of circles of support has helped Concern and partner organisations ensure that issues of HIV or the specific problems of orphans attending schools be addressed. This is demonstrated in a variety of ways:

2.1 Women and children included in school council decision making

School Councils often mirror existing social power relations. People in positions of power, such as school directors, usually control and a child’s opinion is rarely considered. Circles of Support helps break this down by putting women, more marginalised members of the community and children on Councils which provides an important link with fellow students. The increase in children on School Councils is leading to an increase in student peer education groups where issues concerned with HIV/AIDS can be discussed. As one school council member said “It’s very simple

⁸ Research undertaken by Rebecca Heuberger: Nov 2005.

because she's a student it would be very easy for her to transmit the information to her colleagues. We thought she could do it easily" (EPC Mala, Guro, Manica Province October 2005).

As a result of the greater participation of women and girls on School Councils, there is an increased awareness within communities on the importance of a girls' education. "There are some parents who have become more conscious. For example there was a parent who gave back his daughter's wedding ring. She was engaged to marry but after this sensitisation he decided to give back the ring and send his daughter back to school" (School director, Nhafula, Guro October 2005)

2.2 Stronger School Councils means better identification of children in need

They are able to identify, verify and register orphans or other vulnerable children and strengthen their links with service providers e.g. Ministry of Social Welfare who can provide poverty certificates, food, blankets and clothes.



2.3 Ensured rights of orphans specifically included

School Council members have been trained to understand the needs of orphans and ensure these are met at school. Indeed some of the members themselves are orphans. Children lose self-confidence and self-esteem when orphaned, particularly if related to AIDS which often leads to poor school performance. Francisco, an orphan from one of the schools shared how:

"We have problems a lot of the time at school. For an orphaned child it is not possible to reach your goal of studying. This is because we don't have uniforms and ... lots of things. Problems at home, a lack of food, insults for no reason... There are the problems in the house... these are the problems of orphans" (October 2005)

Children when asked said that schools had helped them and that many enjoyed school, and that the linkages with school feeding or social welfare were helpful.

2.4 Reduced incidence of sexual abuse of children in schools.

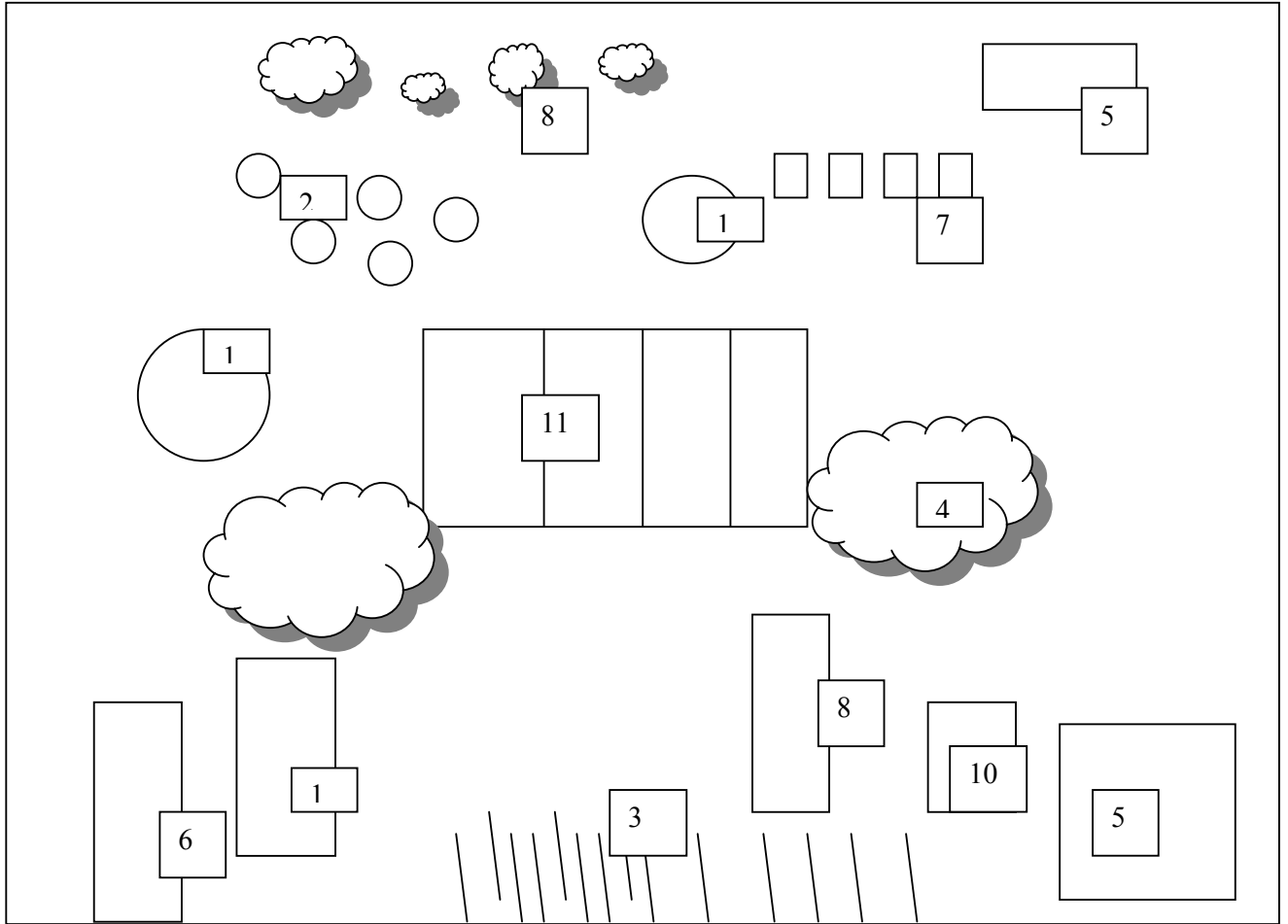
Teachers can be sent to work in rural areas, far from their families and social networks. This leads to a degree of isolation and frustration and coupled with their powerful position at school, high incidences of sexual and physical abuse are reported. School Councils have been given the mandate by government to hold schools to account. Until recently, they have been relatively inactive with limited capacity but positive action against sexual exploitation is beginning to take place. For instance, a School Council, in collaboration with the District Education Committee, transferred a teacher who had been abusing children at school by securing two written declarations, used as evidence.

2.5 School Councils are more motivated to carry out specific projects that specifically address some of the key barriers to orphans or other vulnerable children attending schools

Projects such as school gardens have been created to provide better nutrition and other income generating schemes have been started with the specific objective to train, generate income for and feed vulnerable children such as farming chickens. Another successful intervention was boarding facilities have been set up to enable easier access to school for children and links with school feeding programmes have been made.

2.6 Schools and communities see themselves as important in mitigating the impact of AIDS

There is better community participation and mobilisation of local resources to respond to the impact of AIDS. For example, fund raising activities have been organised by communities for materials for orphans. At a more fundamental level is the work of one primary school in EPC Dunda, Macossa District, Manica Province which has created an environment that protects and supports all children in the context of HIV/AIDS and has met some specific needs of orphans. This school used the advice of the School Council in setting up its physical shape as shown on the next page.



1. Extra classrooms built by the community mobilised and managed by the School Council. Improves access to education for all children.
2. Teachers and students' houses, built by the community mobilised and managed by the School Council. Enables children who live far from school to access education with more safety, they do not have travel long distances each day.
1. The school is fenced to improve safety for students arranged by the School Council.
2. School kitchen under a tree provides one cooked meal a day for all children, two a day for OVC. The food is provided by WFP, School Council facilitated this link.
3. School garden and granary, trains 30 OVC in agriculture linked with FAO.
4. Football field; place for recreation.
5. Gender sensitive latrines (with separate latrines for girls, boys and teachers); improve health, safety and hygiene for all children.
6. Fruit trees; donated by DDA who give technical training to children.
7. Teachers resource centre; built by Concern with the school council.
8. Water pump with potable water for all children and teachers.
9. Classrooms and school office.

3 Core elements of Circles of Support

3.1 Children need to be included into HIV/AIDS responses

Vulnerable children need many different kinds of protection which they themselves can help identify, and therefore they need to be included in assessments, analysis and action planning. Their inclusion offers insightful information from which innovative ideas can blossom. Furthermore, it has been recognised that the support that they need, can rarely be provided by a single source- HIV mainstreaming has helped to strengthen the links with other actors. To properly include children, different techniques must be applied such as letting them express their needs as pictures.

3.2 Participation of a broad representation of the community is essential

Without it, a complete picture of barriers to inclusion in schools will not emerge. This means the implementing agency must spend time building up its own skills in participatory techniques and allowing the speed of the process to be dictated by the community itself.

3.3 Any agency introducing Circles of Support into schools should move slowly putting emphasis on sensitisation of issues around orphans and HIV

3.4 Monitoring should be as key as planning to track progress

Planning and monitoring should be considered as part of the core work of Circles of Support so the evidence of a more supportive and secure environment for orphans and vulnerable children becomes visible and its impact on educational achievements of these groups is possible to track.

Conclusion

The initial results of applying Circles of Support have proved promising. And Concern Mozambique and its partners are committed to expanding it to other provinces. The next phase will monitor to see if it can demonstrate a greater accountability of the broader community to all children, including those infected or affected by HIV to a quality education.