

HIV/AIDS is an immense challenge to the education sector and is already undermining progress towards the goal of education for all by affecting the demand, supply, and quality of education.

—Dakar Education Forum 2000

THE IMPACT OF HIV AND AIDS ON THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Countries that fail to control the HIV and AIDS epidemic while prevalence rates are still relatively low may face a large challenge in the future. After HIV and AIDS becomes widespread, it has a tendency to expand much faster because more individuals and many different groups of society are affected.

The HIV and AIDS epidemic does not affect only individuals—it affects every part of society. Achievements in human development are undermined as countries lose young and productive people to the epidemic, economies stumble, households fall into deeper poverty and the costs of the epidemic mount. This situation develops into a spiral as deteriorating socioeconomic conditions render people and communities more vulnerable to the epidemic. More infections lead to more poverty, which in turn leads to more infections, setting in motion a vicious cycle.

HIV and AIDS poses a severe threat to the education sector. The epidemic's impact on the African education systems shows clearly that Caribbean countries need to learn from the African experience. If nothing is done about the epidemic, the impact of HIV and AIDS may become as severe as it is in sub-Saharan Africa. The threats to education include the following:

- ▶ **DEMAND.** HIV and AIDS has a negative effect on students, and the number of students in schools decreases. As the epidemic advances, more children will be sick, and many children, especially girls, may be withdrawn from school to care for sick relatives or to take over household responsibilities (thus increasing their vulnerabilities—e.g., through exploitation). Financially, fewer families will be able to support their children's education. For psychological and stigma-related reasons, children will be less willing to enter and remain in school, and they may be distracted and therefore less able to learn.
- ▶ **SUPPLY.** The education sector will lose human resources as teachers, school administrators and supporting staff die, fall sick or are psychologically traumatised by family and community deaths due to AIDS and therefore become unable to work. Furthermore, schools will receive less support from families and communities.



- ▶ **QUALITY.** If the education sector cannot support HIV and AIDS-affected teachers or replace those who fall ill, are frequently absent or die, the morale of people working in the education sector—and thus the quality of the education system—will deteriorate. Educational quality will also be inadequate if curricula do not provide the knowledge and skills that young people in an AIDS-affected society need, including education about health and sex, coping with illness and death in the family, nondiscrimination toward people living with HIV and AIDS, gender roles and issues, and life skills.
- ▶ **PLANNING.** HIV and AIDS has an impact on government ministries, departments, agencies and policymakers responsible for proper planning and allocation of educational resources and services. Anticipating and then dealing with the epidemic's impact on the demand, supply and quality of education require time, advance planning and expertise.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CARIBBEAN MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION¹

- ▶ The Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports in Barbados has sensitized one-third of its teaching staff to HIV/AIDS-related issues. The Commission's abstinence programme was launched in primary schools.
- ▶ In 2004 the Ministry of Education in Jamaica received cabinet approval for a National Policy for HIV and AIDS Management in Schools.
- ▶ In 2003, the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago launched an abstinence only programme.

Resources on the Impact of HIV and AIDS on Education

Mobile Task Team on the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education website: <http://www.mttaids.com/site/>
<<http://www.mttaids.com/site/>>

World Bank; UNAIDS; IIEP/UNESCO; Partnership for Child Development. Modeling the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education Systems: A Training Manual, Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2002.
http://hivaidsclearinghouse.unesco.org/ev_en.php?ID=1378_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC
<http://hivaidsclearinghouse.unesco.org/ev_en.php?ID=1378_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC>

World Bank and The Partnership for Child Development. School Health: HIV/AIDS and Education website: <http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/HIV-AIDS%20&%20Education.htm>
<<http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/HIV-AIDS%20&%20Education.htm>>

¹ Source: M. Morissey, "Response of the Education Sector in the Commonwealth Caribbean to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: A Preliminary Overview" (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2005).

