

NATION EDUCATION



BLACKBOARD

Every Monday

Experts spell out measures to reduce epidemic

The workshop made wide ranging resolutions to address the Aids scourge, which threatens to wipe the gains made in education.

One, the participants recommended the establishment of national and regional networks for researchers dealing with Aids. This will enhance co-ordination of research activities and provide information on areas that require further inquiry. Two, they recommended that an awareness campaign should be launched to sensitise education

officials on the impacts of the epidemic on schooling.

They called for re-evaluation and re-designing of education policies to take cognisance of the needs of Aids orphans.

Other resolutions were: examining alternative strategies of educational provision to children who have dropped out of school due to Aids.

• Sensitising the media personnel on Aids and its impacts on education so that they can help in disseminating information that would help to

eliminate the epidemic.

• Researching on the impact of the epidemic. The research, it was resolved, should look into ways of enhancing participation of children in schools. It should also examine the impact of Aids on the supply and quality of teachers. Further, the research should assess the nature of Aids patients home-care and the role of children as health-care providers.

• Another recommendation was the establishment of youth-friendly reproductive health services within national primary health care programmes, including counselling.

• Institutions were asked to initiate and undertake public and private communication activities to demystify Aids and eliminate the associated stigma.

• There is also need to devise intervention programmes that would mitigate the impact of the epidemic, including reducing poverty and ensuring access to legal services to protect them from discrimination or abuse.

There is no doubt that the workshop made very useful recommendations, which if implemented would go a long way to stem the spread of HIV/Aids in the region.

Aids taking toll on learning

Aids scourge is fast emerging as a major impediment to the achievement of the education for all goal.

School children, teachers and parents are becoming victims of the scourge. Many children are forced out of school when their parents die due to Aids. Learning programmes are affected when teachers get infected by the Aids virus and the worst scenario is the demise of learners themselves.

A recent workshop on aids education at Fairview Hotel in Nairobi, brought out the fact that enrolment and participation of children in schools is under serious threat because of Aids.

Research findings presented at the meeting were unnerving. Some 11.4 per cent of girls drop out of school to take charge of their families when their parents contract and finally die from the disease.

The research by the Population Communication Africa (PCA) indicate that the girls are forced out of school as they have to undertake household chores, including caring for their ailing parents and other siblings.

The research was conducted by Dr Tonny Johnstone, Alan Ferguson and Caroline Akoth.

At the regional level, the workshop heard, more than 25 per cent of children under 15 have already lost one or both parents. As a result, most of them are denied the opportunity to go to school.

But the situation is worse when one considers that the children are also victims. The workshop heard that 15 per

cent of the children aged below 20 are infected by the Aids virus. In other words, one out of every 15 school or college children are HIV positive.

This figure is likely to go up to 30 per cent next year and rise to 60 per cent by 2005. If this is combined with the other factors that hinder enrolment in schools like poverty, then the level of participation of children in schools is likely to reduce drastically.

Part of the reasons why Aids is becoming a serious problem in schools is due to lack of access to relevant, accurate and timely information about health and sexuality.

It is for this reason that the participants argued for the introduction of sex education in schools. The regional workshop on "The Impact of HIV/Aids on Schooling and Adolescent Welfare in East Africa" was told that the neglect of sex education by schools and parents had constrained the capacity to address the realities of the epidemic.

And there is a gender dimension to the problem. Statistics from the National Aids/STD Control Programme (NASCP) presented at the workshop showed that girls risked contracting the virus more than boys.

It was noted that 18 per cent of teenage girls get infected in the first year of engaging sexual intercourse. Within three and five years, 24 and 46 per cent are infected respectively.

An analysis of multi-site studies sponsored by UNAids showed that in Western Kenya, nearly one out of every four girls within the age bracket of 15-19 is living with the Aids virus compared with one boy out of every 25 in the same age group.



A teacher takes students through a biology lesson: A recent workshop was told that more girls than boys were affected by Aids.

Stories by DAVID MUGONYI



Justice Aluoch: Legal intervention crucial



Dr Wilson: Stress on family life education

Cumulatively, the greatest percentage of those infected by the disease get it through unprotected sex. The workshop heard that the Aids epidemic creates a vicious circle. It reduces a family's economic base and forces children to drop out of school. Without education, the children are forced into demeaning occupations such as prostitution to earn a living, and this exposes them

more to Aids infection.

The participants also heard that stigmatisation associated with the epidemic affected pupils psychologically, thus jeopardising their academic performance.

Further, isolation of the pupils impacted on their development and participation in school. Teachers too are feeling the brunt of the scourge. Since many are denying due to the

epidemic, the few teachers remaining cannot cope up with increased work load. Ultimately, this affects their delivery and overall performance.

Moreover, the teachers have not been trained on how to handle Aids orphans, which adds a social dimension to the problem. The teachers cannot simply cope with the learning needs of the orphans.

The workshop also explored the impact of Aids on school finances. It was pointed out that a lot of resources from parents or community are used to treat Aids victims and even assist the orphans. The resultant effect is that there is little that remains to be put into the school's development programmes. At the individual level, many households are rendered poor due to Aids, thus are unable to pay school fees.

Participants were told that mistrust between parents and teachers has prompted some parents to withdraw their children from school because of fear of teachers using their female pupils for sex.

Given this scenario, Unicef Country Representative, Dr Chrispin Wilson, said the inclusion of sex education in the curriculum was an imperative. He argued that the most effective way of reaching out to parents is through teaching the children about sexuality and

related issues. This was also the best way for preparing the children psychologically to cope with the Aids victims.

But the Catholic Church is still not convinced. They issued a quick rejoinder saying the inclusion of the subject in the curriculum was against their faith and was likely to worsen the situation.

The church contends that sex education would encourage the youth to involve themselves in immoral activities.

Delivering the keynote address, the director of Unesco regional office based in Nairobi, Dr Paul Vitta, said education was the most effective way of disseminating information to bring about behavioural change.

Closing the workshop, Lady Justice Joyce Aluoch called on the government to implement policies on Aids.

She said the Judiciary was working on policies to enable Aids orphans inherit their parents property to enable them pursue education. "Everyone in our society has a responsibility to eliminate the stigma associated with Aids," she said.

The epidemic, she observed, threatened to wipe out gains made in school enrolment ratios.