

Teachers Stepping Stones to behavioural change in Malawi

08 January 2007

The Tiwoloke Project

In Malawi, the education sector like all sectors is losing a lot of people to HIV and AIDS. The loss of qualified personnel, reduced productivity, increased absenteeism and low morale all having a direct impact on the quality of education. Without intervention, this trend would undermine the Government's efforts of achieving its targets for education and development.

The Tiwoloke Project (which means "let's cross" in Chichewa) is a behavioural change initiative for primary school teachers in Malawi's primary schools aimed at reducing the spread. It aims to empower primary school teachers and their partners with knowledge and skills to reduce their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS and to promote a healthy life. Tiwoloke is being funded by DFID, Malawi's National AIDS Commission (NAC) and Action Aid, an international non-governmental organisation. DFID has committed almost £700,000 to this project.

Stepping Stones

The Tiwoloke Project incorporates Stepping Stones training. Stepping Stones is a training package in gender, HIV, communication and relationship skills. It is also a life-skills training package, covering many aspects of peoples lives, including why we behave in the ways we do, and ways in which we can change our behaviour, if we want to. It was originally designed both for use in existing HIV and AIDS projects and in general community development projects which plan to introduce an on-going HIV and sexual and reproductive health component.

Salima district gives a picture of how HIV and AIDS is affecting education. Like all other districts in the country, Salima has endured the death of a big number of primary school teachers. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of teachers declined from 1300 to 790. As teacher numbers decline, classroom sizes have expanded sometimes as high as 240 pupils with one teacher in charge. This leaves many children unsupervised.

Ethel Msampha

Mrs. Ethel Msampha is a teacher at Nchoka Primary School in Salima. She has been teaching for the last 10 years and currently has 247 Standard 2 pupils in her class. Her husband, Kelvin, a health assistant at the local health centre, and her, have done the Stepping Stones training:

"It is wonderful to learn things I have not heard before. The project enabled me to understand myself and my relationship with my husband better. This understanding enabled me to become more open to discuss subjects including sex which I wouldn't have dared mention before. My husband became more open too and now we don't keep secrets from each other. Our children have benefited as we now discuss our incomes and can provide more for them. The closeness of my family is a source of pride for me.

Department For International Development (DFID)

“With this training, we’re going to be able to help the community by sharing what we’ve learnt so they can also enjoy the benefits of the training. We’ll teach them all the topics and I’m sure that this is going to help stop spouses straying and spreading the HIV and AIDS virus.

“I know that HIV and AIDS has been one of the main reasons for teachers’ long absences. They are either directly affected or they have to take care of their infected spouses. I know that if I’m sick and can’t go to school, this discourages the children and leads to increased drop-outs. I feel that openness and close relationships between a teacher and his or her spouse will have a positive impact on the quality of the teacher’s performance. With what I have now, I come to my class every day with a light heart.”

Tiwoloke Project will help secure the future of Malawi's education sector. Over 16,000 teachers and spouses are expected to undergo the training in the first 12 months of the project. If achieved, the impact of the project is expected to spill over into the communities where the teachers stay as they share the messages they have learnt.

Key facts

- Number of Primary school teachers in Malawi - 45,075
- Number of teachers needed - 53,345
- Number of primary pupils - 3,200,646
- Teachers in 33 districts - it is planned that all the teachers will be involved in this project.