

**Background Paper for Global Partners' Forum on Children Affected by HIV/AIDS
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EDUCATION ACCESS FOR CHILDREN AFFECTED BY HIV AND AIDS¹

Children affected by HIV and AIDS and schooling

HIV and AIDS has a devastating impact on children, affects their access to school, and deepens inequalities in education access. Orphans and other children affected by HIV and AIDS have fewer chances to go to school and/or systematically attend and perform than those not affected by the pandemic. This paper discusses ways to reduce these disparities and to enhance the education access of children affected by HIV and AIDS, especially within the framework of free basic quality education. It aims to contribute to the dialogue on supporting governments in school fee abolition and removal of other financial barriers to education by highlighting the specific needs of children affected by HIV and AIDS. This parity objective is given prominence as an MDG indicator and reiterated in the core indicators of the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment.

The effects of AIDS begin to impinge on children, especially younger children, before the parent dies. These effects can start when an adult become ill, well before a child becomes an orphan, and include delays in enrolment, breaks in schooling and permanent drop out. Double orphans are more likely than single orphans to be out of school in sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the largest number of children affected by HIV and AIDS. No existing studies find a significantly stronger effect of orphanhood on schooling for girls in comparison with boys. However, we know that the disadvantages that girls face, whether orphaned or not, do persist, which requires additional specific measures.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on children's schooling is affected to a strong degree by country level factors. Different specific factors drive this – these may include poverty, education level of parents or caregivers, and perceptions of quality and relevance of education. Particularly in countries where enrolment is already low, HIV/AIDS has the impact of exacerbating poor enrolment; the differences in school enrolment between orphans and non-orphans are highest in those countries. In higher enrolment countries, there are potentially a range of different factors at work.

On the other hand, education can leverage significant improvements in the lives of children affected by HIV and AIDS. The role of education as a "social vaccine" against HIV infection is increasingly recognised. Evidence from many regions demonstrates the protective value of schooling, especially for young women who are at increased risk of infection in heavily affected countries. In addition to empowering girls and conferring valuable life skill education, schooling can contribute to a child's social integration and psychosocial development and provide a safe, structured environment in turbulent times. These benefits are particularly critical objective for AIDS-affected children, who may be at heightened risk of HIV infection. It is a sad irony that the very children who need quality education are less likely to access it than their peers.

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Ensuring that children affected by HIV and AIDS, especially girls, are in school to receive these benefits must be part of a strategy to break the cycle of HIV infection.

Factors preventing school access for children affected by HIV and AIDS

There has been relatively little research on the specific obstacles that children affected by AIDS face in enrolling, and maintaining participation, in school. Cost is clearly an issue. A range of other factors are also at work to disadvantage children affected by HIV and AIDS in terms of their school attendance, requiring accompanying strategies and specific targeted support to ensure that they enter and complete school. Barriers to regular school attendance and performance include poverty, home care requirements, opportunity costs (lost earning power), relationship of child to caregivers, and stigma and discrimination. Evidence indicates that in lower prevalence countries, discrimination plays a strong role in preventing school access for HIV and AIDS-affected children.

It is likely that country and household level factors lead to a variety of different scenarios for children affected by HIV and AIDS; there remains much to learn about the magnitude of school costs in comparison with other barriers. Some research has concluded that poverty is a more important factor than orphanhood, others that whilst cost is a factor, it is less important than the degree of relatedness between the child and their caregiver. Experience in several countries indicates that the private cost of schooling to households is a major barrier that prevents many children from accessing and completing quality basic education. This is particularly significant in countries where poverty imposes tough choices on families and households about how many and which of their children to send to school, and for how long. The burden of such costs on poor households can be significant.

There are programmes in operation that are designed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic by supporting the school costs of children affected by HIV and AIDS. A range of organisations are supporting their school costs, including both government and civil society. This expenditure goes on a range of inputs: tuition fees, uniforms, other fees or assessments. There are attempts by governments (through waivers, PRSPs, Education For All [EFA] plans) to reduce the costs of schooling for children affected by HIV and AIDS – and possibly there are more such attempts now than in the past.

There is a need to analyse the relative effectiveness of these approaches. However, it is clear that the focus of effort should be on removing these private costs altogether, which would benefit all poor and vulnerable children while having a significant positive impact for children affected by HIV and AIDS. There are still likely to be other barriers which prevent some children affected by AIDS from completing a free basic quality education, but it is difficult to address them if potentially the most significant barrier remains. Taking this bold step would also open up the opportunity to identify more appropriate safety nets for those children who still do not complete a basic education.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence for the negative effect of fees on enrolment has been the surges in enrolment, particularly amongst the poor, when fees are abolished. Free schooling counts among the major factors which impact on enrolment growth rates. When free schooling was introduced in Uganda in 1997, primary school enrolment nearly doubled, from 3.4 to 5.7 million children, rising to 6.5 million by 1999. Girls' enrolment increased from 63% to 83% overall, while enrolment of girls from the poorest fifth of households almost doubled, rising from 46 % to 82%. Free schooling may be the single and most important policy measure that

has had a dramatic and transforming impact on school enrolment so far, because it unleashes latent demand for education and encourages children from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate.

A "Bold Initiative" on the abolition of school fees

There is a growing momentum worldwide to abolish school fees. However, the majorities of countries are still implementing school fees even when they have legislated against them. School fees represent around 30 percent of all education spending in Africa. Furthermore, while the quantum leap in certain countries that have implemented abolition is unmistakable, analysis and experience show that some gains are being eroded and that there are many problems and challenges in the process of planning and implementation that need to be addressed.

Against this background, UNICEF and the World Bank launched a "Bold Initiative" on school fee abolition in the summer of 2005, which is now rallying different sectors (Education, HIV/AIDS, Protection, Policy, Advocacy and Communication) as well as development partners (UN agencies, donors, NGO networks, academic institutions). The Initiative was launched within the framework of international commitments to uphold the principle of free and compulsory primary education for all and to engage on more promising paths towards EFA and the MDGs.

The question of school fee abolition is for most cases not one of political will. There is more argument on the process and challenges of abolishing school fees than actual disagreement on the need to abolish. The issue is how to accompany and support the process of elimination and how to build a partnership to do it in the right way, including outlining and developing key actions that will support countries in the process of addressing the costs of schooling.

Indeed the abolition of school fees is not a panacea. While cost is a major barrier to enrolment, evidence from country experiences is showing that it alone does not determine the demand for education and that other factors need to be taken into consideration and addressed if the gains made are to be consolidated and sustained. These include:

- Quality issues: the abolition of school fees must be accompanied by measures to preserve quality, including retention and completion.
- Equity issues: the abolition of school fees must be accompanied by other specific measures targeting the most vulnerable (such as children affected by HIV and AIDS, working children) to ensure that they benefit from free schooling.
- Financial issues: Financing options for adequate revenue substitution must be planned in the short and medium term and resources must be readily available to facilitate the implementation of the coping measures that were designed, including replacement of lost revenues for schools in cases where charges were levied by schools.
- Planning, management and governance issues: School fee abolition comes with challenges in managing resources and supplies, running requisitions and disbursements, strengthening of decentralized structures to ensure resource flow, supplies and budgetary allocations to the schools, as well as the capacity building of schools in planning, budgeting, procurement and management. Solid planning is required to support the change in policy.
- Policy issues and policy dialogue: Within the new development context of aid effectiveness and of Government appropriation and accountability a sound policy

framework that is integrated into EFA plans and sector-wide approaches is required to make school fee abolition sustainable. The Initiative should also be anchored in financing mechanisms such as the Fast Track Initiative (FTI; where existent) and other mechanisms.

Against this background, the goal of the collaborative effort to abolish school fees is to provide guidance and support to selected countries in planning and implementing a “bold initiative” to abolish school fees and other charges, in securing rapid intensified external assistance in the short and medium term to cope with the “fall outs” of such bold policy measures, and in ensuring long term sustainability in terms of more equitable allocation and effective management of education and other resources. The following specific objectives and activities are being advanced by the partnership:

1. Consolidating existing knowledge on the school fee abolition issue by bringing together various studies undertaken by different agencies and scholars.
2. Harnessing the experiential knowledge and experience of key officials and technical experts from countries that have been through the consequences of policy measures related to school fee abolition.
3. Supporting selected countries that are ready, willing and able to take bold policy measures in the abolition of school fees and other charges, by securing financial and technical assistance to see them through the process of planning and implementation.
4. Enhancing knowledge and experience of dealing with the issues of school fee abolition by mounting an action research initiative to study the planning and implementation process in the selected countries.
5. Developing a strategy to synchronize global action and campaigns on school fee abolition, to mobilize the support of partners, and to leverage resources.

The “Bold Initiative” and children affected by HIV and AIDS

Removing school costs to basic quality education will surely bring significant benefits for all vulnerable children, including children affected by HIV and AIDS. Approaches are needed that balance meeting immediate needs for particularly vulnerable groups with longer term sustainable strategies that address systemic challenges. Where informal fees persist, there may be a role for waiver schemes in the short term, though their effectiveness is not proven.

At country level, it will be critical to develop more coordinated approaches to HIV and AIDS, education for all children, and support for vulnerable children. In order to ensure that children affected by HIV and AIDS benefit from national policy reforms, programmes designed to address HIV and AIDS should fit coherently into strategies to reduce the private costs of education and the development of safety nets. For example, coordinating GFATM or MAP funding for education access for children affected by HIV and AIDS with wider education strategies and social welfare reforms would reduce the dissipation of resources and sustain longer term impacts. Community based organisations can be partners in school fee abolition, including tackling community level costs, following up on vulnerable children, and monitoring the impact of national policy reforms.

Even with a reduction or removal of financial barriers to basic quality education, it will be necessary to identify ways to reduce non-cost related barriers (e.g.,) that prevent children affected by HIV and AIDS from regularly attending school. Challenges to be addressed include issues within education (e.g. stigma, trauma), and beyond it (other basic needs including food

and shelter, opportunity costs of education, psychosocial care, and the value of education for children and caregivers). Priorities will change over a child's lifetime: for younger children, psycho-social care may be a priority but for older children, addressing the opportunity costs of education may be the most important element of keeping them in school.

Research is required to identify and analyse the range of barriers that prevent children affected by HIV and AIDS from completing basic education, and therefore identifying what additional actions would support this over and above fee abolition.

Recommendations

Enrolling and keeping children in schools is essential to reducing their vulnerability to the impacts of HIV and AIDS. In order to scale education access and retention of children, the following actions are a priority:

- Harnessing the political momentum around education for children and AIDS to strengthen international efforts including the multi-partner 'Bold Initiative', the EFA movement, and the FTI, to mobilise political will and leverage technical and financial support.
- Sustaining support to governments to develop and implement education reforms which integrate the needs of children affected by AIDS, and link up with a framework of comprehensive social welfare.
- Ensuring that HIV and AIDS funded education activities are coordinated with national education reform and social welfare reform to support and not detract from these responses.