

MEDIA RELEASE

Barclays teams up with UNICEF South Africa to strengthen Girls Education and HIV Prevention in young people in South Africa

Programme changing children's lives says Barclays Chief

"I am convinced that GEM is empowering girls to face difficult life challenges. If only one child is changed it would still be a success, but from what I've seen today, this programme is changing many children's lives."

That was the message from Barclays Chief Executive Officer David Roberts to 1,500 children in KwaZulu Natal schools that are directly benefiting from the bank's decision to invest 4 million rands (£350,000) in the girls' education movement.

Mr. Roberts, accompanied by an international delegation of top executives, UNICEF Country Representative Macharia Kamau and journalists from Italy, Portugal, Spain, and France, came back to South Africa to listen to boys and girls talk about the impact of the Girls Education Movement (GEM) on their daily lives, their needs, concerns and aspirations in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Children and young people at the Intshisekelo Secondary School located in the peri-urban Inanda district greeted the delegation in a vibrant child-led programme of drama, dialogue, dance and songs planned by the members of the school's GEM club.

Following the visit, Mr. Roberts reaffirmed the Bank's commitment to partnership with UNICEF and to supporting the GEM initiative. "Barclays is well aware of the importance of the issue of HIV/AIDS from both a humanitarian and economic standpoint and we are delighted to be a part of UNICEF's campaign in partnership with the Government of South Africa to fight the spread of the virus," Mr. Roberts said. "I know we did the right thing in supporting this programme and the young people who represent the future of this country," he said.

UNICEF Representative Macharia Kamau added, "Girls and young women here in South Africa are the daughters of a new democracy and the most vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. It's time we equip and strengthen their skills to turn the tide against HIV and AIDS through prevention and through programmes that recognise their value to society. By educating and creating supportive environments for all children, especially girls, we will have a strong chance to survive this epidemic."

Today, the GEM programme which was launched in Parliament in 2003, is being rolled out across the country in all 9 provinces by UNICEF South Africa in partnership with the national Department of Education.

The UNICEF country office is currently conducting a snap audit of the GEM programme to determine how many schools actually have fully operating GEM clubs. UNICEF is also conducting an impact evaluation of the programme to determine its effect on the lives of children.

The GEM programme tackles HIV/AIDS at the important prevention stage by ensuring equal access for education for girls and providing important life skills. Barclays' support to GEM, set for two years 2006 and 2007, aims to strengthen the GEM programme within the context of the child friendly schools, an initiative that works to make schools safe environments conducive to children's learning. It also ensures that schools are gender sensitive and have strong ties to surrounding communities, orphans and vulnerable children.

The GEM programme focuses on providing girls and boys with practical life skills as a means to empowering them to cope with challenging situations, particularly with regard to HIV prevention. HIV and AIDS continues to be one of the biggest challenges faced by young South Africans today, with an estimated 5.5 million people infected, the second highest in the world infected.

ends