

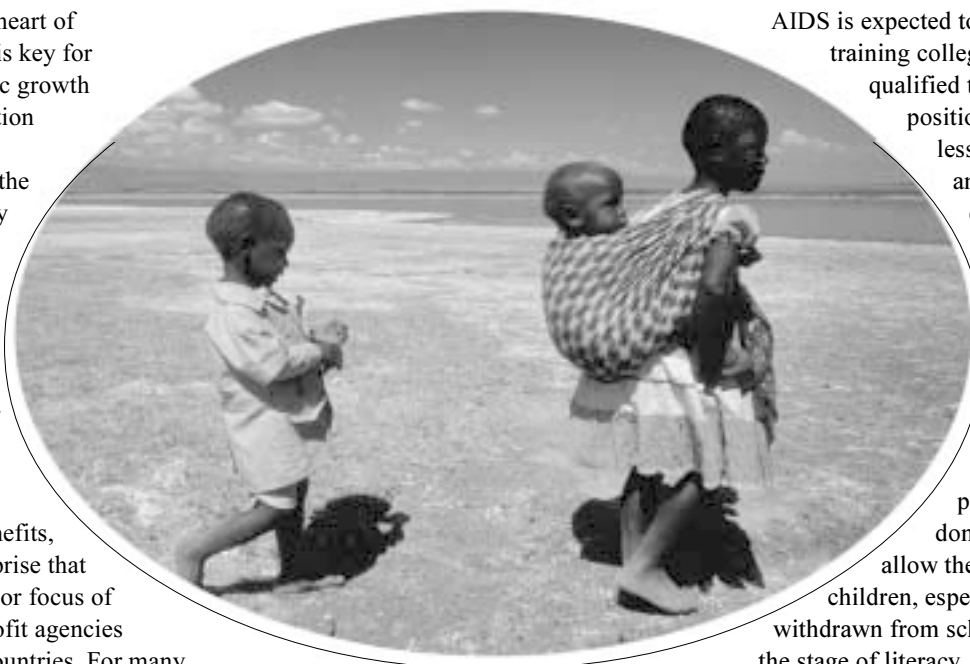
# WE HAVE AIDS

## Choking the seeds of LEARNING

**E**ducation is at the heart of development and is key for fostering economic growth around the world. Education provides an immediate benefit by giving people the knowledge and skills they need to have a head start in the world. It also leads to secondary benefits like improved health and nutrition for women and children, and ways for societies to nurture and renew their cultural life.

With all of these benefits, it should come as no surprise that education has been a major focus of governments and non-profit agencies working in developing countries. For many years, education has been emphasized in development work. As a result, many countries have successfully planted seeds of knowledge that are already beginning to bear the fruit of an educated populace.

Unfortunately, many of those same "seeds" are now threatened by the weed of HIV/AIDS. AIDS is choking a fledgling



*A young girl helps her younger siblings, keeping her out of school.*

CIDA PHOTO: ROGER LEMOYNE

infrastructure by creating large shortages of teachers. UNICEF estimates that 860,000 children in sub-Saharan Africa lost their teachers to AIDS in 1999. In the most affected countries, the loss of teachers due to

AIDS is expected to outstrip the ability of training colleges to provide new qualified teachers. Empty teaching positions are often filled by less qualified individuals, and the quality of education declines.

Tragically, while the supply of education is diminishing as qualified teachers die, the demand for education is also slipping. Seeds of education are being planted in children who don't have fertile soil to allow them to grow. Many children, especially girls, are withdrawn from school before they reach the stage of literacy. Instead of attending classes, they are needed to care for sick family members or earn money to supplement the household income.

Orphans and orphan-headed households often cannot afford the costs associated with school, both in terms of finances and time commitment. And, as explained in the

*continued...* **EDUCATION'S**

### A Window of Hope

BY ALICIA ZENTS, CRWRC IN KENYA

**T**he church has a special role to play in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In Kenya, the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA) is developing a biblical-values based curriculum for primary aged children to help eliminate the spread of

AIDS. Due to a history of church sponsored education, the RCEA has a unique opportunity to introduce and offer AIDS education in the public primary and secondary schools.

The 8-12 year age bracket is considered the "window of opportunity" for AIDS programs in Africa. That is because children of this age group have not yet become sexually active and do not fall into

the 1-5 year-old category of those who have been infected by their mothers at birth or through breast feeding. The 8-12 year olds are a population of bright children who can still receive the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that could help them make healthy decisions as they grow up.

The RCEA's curriculum is aimed at this *continued...* **WINDOW**



CIDA PHOTO: DAVID BARBOUR

*A teacher engages in HIV/AIDS education.*

# EDUCATION'S STRUGGLE AGAINST AIDS

*Continued...*

newsletter on youth (No. 4 - Aug. 2002), many youth themselves are being infected with HIV/AIDS. As they die, the demand for schools continues to decrease.

The multiple effects of HIV/AIDS present big challenges to the education systems of developing countries that might not be hearty enough to endure them. School management needs to be flexible in order to accommodate learning off-campus and outside of regular school hours. Teachers need to gain new skills, such as human rights education, counseling, and trauma support. And the system, in general, needs to make HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention an integral part of the planning and design of

education.

Yes, AIDS is having a devastating impact on education around the world. This deserves our concern. At the same time, the seeds of education that have been planted in developing countries have enormous potential to bring healing. A recent ICAD fact sheet reports that "some observers are speaking with hope about an 'education vaccine' against AIDS," noting that education attacks poverty and unequal power relations, thereby removing the fertile soil in which HIV/AIDS takes root and grows.

*(Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development, "HIV/AIDS and Education" and The World Bank "Education and HIV/AIDS: A Window of Hope.")*

## Window of Hope

*Continued...*

target group. Its purpose is to help teachers empower children to make good decisions by giving them valuable knowledge and life skills. The curriculum will look at several broad areas such as relationships, health, goal-setting, and life (where it comes from, why it is special). In the area of relationships, the curriculum will cover what healthy, biblical relationships are like and how can we relate appropriately to each other, our families and others. It is also intended to address the issues of peer relationships so children can learn what makes a good or bad friend and how to cope with negative peer pressure. For older children there would be specific lessons on sexuality, relating to girls and boys, and appropriate expressions of sexuality. Most importantly, the lessons will be a forum where youth can speak about such issues.

Teachers will use the prepared lesson plans to help students focus on each broad area and develop their attitudes, skills, and knowledge about it. The hope is that by working through this curriculum, children will gain life skills, biblical values, and positive attitudes to help them make healthy choices.

This curriculum is still being developed and CRWRC staff and members of the RCEA are confident that it will be a strong influence in the fight against AIDS among young people in Africa.

*Excerpts from Missions & Missionaries, vol. 106, April/May 2002, used with permission*

## A PRAYER FOR USE AT HOME AND CHURCH

Hear our prayer, O God of mercy and love, for all who live with HIV or AIDS. We pray today in particular for the challenges in education facing many in East and southern Africa.

We pray for those thirsty for an opportunity to learn to read and write and for those charged with making this opportunity possible.

Grant wisdom to governments, teachers, families and children.

Stir the hearts of those who are in a position to make necessary changes and assure necessary funds.

All this we ask you, Lord, in the assurance that with you all things are possible. Through Jesus Christ, our Savior, who came to give us abundant life, Amen.



## UNESCO (<http://www.unesco.org>)

**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** recognizes the impact that HIV/AIDS has on individuals and communities and how the disease is impacting education systems and people's ability to take advantage of it.

[http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/335\\_41.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/335_41.pdf)

[http://www.unesco.org/iiep/english/whnew/hiv\\_aids.htm](http://www.unesco.org/iiep/english/whnew/hiv_aids.htm)

## UNAIDS (<http://www.unaids.org>)

As the leading advocate for worldwide action against HIV/AIDS, the global mission of UNAIDS is to lead, strengthen and support an expanded response to the epidemic that will: prevent the spread of HIV; provide care and support for those infected and affected by the disease; reduce the vulnerability of individuals and communities to HIV/AIDS; and alleviate the socio-economic and human impact of the epidemic.

These web sites present information related to HIV/AIDS and social justice and they challenge us to think deeply about and take action on many issues. The content, statements or links found within these sites do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or endorsement by, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action or the Christian Reformed Church.