

SIERRA LEONE

FACTS

- Adult Literacy: 34.8%
- Life expectancy: 41.8 years
- 68% of the population live below the national poverty line
- Less than 1/3 of females over the age of 10 can read and write
- Under 5 Mortality (m/f): 290/264 per 1,000
- In the United Nations Human Development Report 2009 (Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development), Sierra Leone was ranked 180 out of 182 countries on the Human Development Index



BACKGROUND

Years of conflict in Sierra Leone left an estimated 500,000-1.5 million people displaced, many fled to temporary camps in Sierra Leone or in neighbouring Guinea and Liberia. The effect of widespread migration and the atrocities carried out by rebel groups have contributed to an increase in the rate of HIV infection, while the rising rate of drug and alcohol abuse and change in behavioural trends has further fuelled the rate of infection.

The National Aids Secretariat (NAS) and the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport (MEYS) have made HIV a compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum, meaning teachers are requested to teach about it. However teachers are often ill-prepared to teach about HIV in the classroom; they have not been trained and lack the confidence to teach the lessons, therefore missing them out.

This is crucial because years of conflict, accompanied by migration and atrocities committed by rebel groups, has led to the risk of large numbers of young people being affected by HIV/AIDS. Many of them are unaware of the effects, how to reduce the spread of infection and activities that can prolong the life of people who have HIV/AIDS. A UNICEF survey showed that while 72.3% of adolescents had heard of HIV/AIDS, only 7.7% showed an adequate understanding of how it is transmitted.

Recognising the lack of awareness of methods of HIV/AIDS transmission and the difficulty in changing adult behaviour, it is imperative that children and adolescents are educated on the threat of HIV/AIDS and ways to avoid infection.

HIV/AIDS EDUCATION

Children in Crisis has been working alongside local organisation FAWA (Forum for African Women Educationalists) since 1999 rehabilitating and rebuilding 11 schools. Since 2004, CiC and FAWA have been working on a programme to provide HIV/AIDS education to children in primary schools in Freetown and Kambia in Sierra Leone.



The CiC/FAWE HIV/AIDS education programme seeks to develop awareness and educational methodologies, at present the only viable option for defeating the pandemic or at least slowing its spread. We believe that this model can be replicable within Sierra Leone and in other countries and our intention is to share the experience gained with our partners and wider HIV/AIDS coalitions.

CiC ran a three year programme from 2004-2007 and trained 300 teachers who now teach the HIV/AIDS curriculum to over eleven thousand children. The HIV/AIDS training team also developed a curriculum and trained 100 community members as peer educators to deliver HIV/AIDS education. To make the project more replicable, a consultant worked with the training team to design a teacher's lesson book.

In May 2008, CiC and FAWE started a second phase of the programme with schools in more areas of Freetown and Kambia. So far, approximately 222 teachers in central Freetown and rural Kambia have been trained. The training team have also developed the community work to include training for Community Teacher Associations who have in turn held discussions and information sessions with 240 parents. Engaging the whole community this way is crucial for the messages to have the greatest impact.

'I have learnt a lot about HIV, through my own work and through attending workshops. I can teach my own children at home. People ask us questions even outside the training session because they know we are well-trained. Sometimes we convince people, not only the ones we have trained, because they do not really believe HIV is real. Even the chiefs, we talk to them and convince them. I talk with my husband and my children about it.'

*An HIV/AIDS
Teacher Trainer*



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