



## Adult education for survival

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Adult Learning Commentary Number 6, 4 April 2001

One of the greatest educational challenges presently facing Southern Africa is the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic. Southern Africa has the highest incidence in the world, and thousands of people are dying. HIV/AIDS is having substantial effects on both economies and the working adult population that is most vulnerable. Estimates are that there are 12 million AIDS orphans in Africa; and that the Higher Education population in South Africa is 22% HIV/AIDS positive and will be 33% positive by 2005.

Various strategies have been developed over the last ten years to counter the pandemic. It is a sexually transmitted disease that is exacerbated by poverty. Educational processes are called on that challenge deep-seated cultural, religious, ethnic, gender, or class attitudes and behaviours. In many societies there are cultural practices that propagate the spread of the virus through promiscuity. Women are most at risk as often it is men who have multiple partners. Power relations between women and men make it nearly impossible for many women to insist on safe sexual practices. Some people predict that until women are empowered and gender relations are more equal, it will be extremely difficult to stem this tide.

Educational programs are being orchestrated in some countries through the Health Ministries but this is seen to be inadequate. In South Africa Departments of Education, Labour, Welfare and Health are beginning to work together. There are over 600 NGOs working to counter HIV/AIDS. In Namibia there are about 12. Some workplaces have begun running education and counselling services for workers. There is a growing awareness that all sectors of society, working with people of all ages, must join together to educate about HIV/AIDS. At the World Aids Conference held in Durban in July 2000, 13 000 scientists, activists, educators,

development workers, government officials and health workers all came together to share research, information, methodologies and policies. There were discussions, debates, information, and papers disseminated on a daily basis through community and national radio, television and newspapers. It was a massive and impressive public educational process.

The growing campaign is being interpreted and taken forward by a very wide range of interest groups with different values, for example, rurally-based indigenous healers, rural and urban women's groups, youth groups, religious and community organisations and educational institutions. They are using different approaches, from ethno-cultural to feminist, popular and spiritual, to raise awareness, provide skills training, and implement development strategies.

Responses to HIV/AIDS provide excellent contemporary examples of adult education for survival. This education involves most sectors of society and draws on multiple pedagogical, organisational and developmental frameworks simultaneously.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is helping to focus the minds of educators, activists, policy-makers and bureaucrats to rethink the connections between education and training at all levels 'from the womb to the tomb'. Also, some activists and educators are beginning to re-think the questions of social purpose and to find new allies in struggles for social justice. At this very moment a court case is in progress in South Africa that unites the South African Government, trade unions, and civil-society AIDS activists against pharmaceutical companies. The latter are suing the Government over its patent laws that enable the country to make generic, affordable drugs, to save millions of lives. Can the tragedy of the AIDS pandemic help realign forces, even for a moment, to value human life over profit?