

Chapter 8

HIV Education for Learners in Zambian Catholic Schools: A Social Justice Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, HIV and AIDS education for learners in Catholic schools was interrogated from a social justice perspective. The author advances the argument that the learners' right to access HIV and AIDS education in the school context was superficial in addressing the needs of learners. Hence, depriving them of the much needed knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for their survival in the context of HIV and AIDS. Therefore, this call for continued dialogue among different stakeholders in order to enable Catholic Schools play the 'social vaccine' role in the face of HIV and AIDS.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter interrogates the theme of HIV education in Catholic secondary schools in Zambia in the context of children's right to access information and social justice. In the advent of HIV and AIDS, the Ministry of Education (MoE) now Ministry of General Education and other sister ministries in the country embraced different strategies to mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS in the country. In education, policies were formulated to guide the implementation of HIV and AIDS programmes in schools and other learning institutions. Different stakeholders in the schools were to benefit from the HIV and AIDS policy differently. Of interest in this chapter are the learners, whose right to access HIV information is at stake due to different factors (teacher inadequacies, lack of learning materials, cultural taboos among others) at play. This is despite the stress by some scholars that education is a social vaccine in the shadow of HIV and AIDS.

In order to explore what the catholic schools were teaching learners on HIV and AIDS, and how they were teaching, the author interviewed the school administrators, teachers, and learners or pupils. In addition, group discussions were held with learners and document reviews conducted on the phenomena of

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interest. The data collected was analysed to answer the research question, why and how HIV education for learners in catholic schools was a social justice issue?

The author argues that learners' access to comprehensive HIV education in the context of the school is a social justice issue, given that schools are social vaccines. More so, the catholic schools should strive to foster social justice especially that they have long been associated with being the mirror of social justice in the society. However, these schools are challenged by the recommended comprehensive and targeted HIV education, thus compromising the reputation of fostering fairness, equity, and preparation of change agents (learners) in the context of HIV and AIDS.

In the following sections the author contextualises the phenomena by highlighting the background to the inquiry (brief history of Zambia, HIV and AIDS in Zambia, Education provision, Catholic education and the of philosophy of social justice in the milieu of HIV and AIDS).

BACKGROUND

Brief History of Zambia

Zambia is a landlocked country with eight neighbouring countries sharing its boundaries. The country measures about 752, 612 square kilometers translating into 2.5% of Africa. Zambia got its independence from Britain in 1964. The country has ten administrative provinces with more than 72 districts (CSO, et al, 2007, p.1). The population by mid 2016 was projected at 15,933,883 of which 7,884,009 constitute males and 8,049,874 female. Health is a priority due to the high disease burden in Zambia, which is compounded by high prevalence of HIV, high poverty levels, and poor macroeconomic situation (CSO, 2016, p.2 & 4).

HIV and AIDS in Zambia

Zambia, like many sub-Saharan countries, has been adversely affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic (CSO, et al, 2007, p.5). Historical accounts reported the first AIDS case in Zambia in 1984. Government through different ministries put up plans and strategies to combat the national HIV and AIDS epidemic. Knowledge of HIV and AIDS is universal in Zambia. Almost all of women and men aged 15-49 have heard of HIV and AIDS. However, only 36% of women and 39% of men have what can be considered comprehensive knowledge about the modes of transmission and prevention. *Comprehensive knowledge is defined as knowing that consistent use of condoms during sexual intercourse and having just one uninfected faithful partner can reduce the chances of getting the AIDS virus, knowing that a healthy-looking person can have HIV, and rejecting the two most common local misconceptions about HIV transmission (that the AIDS virus can be transmitted by mosquito bites and that a person can become infected by sharing food with someone who has the AIDS virus)*, CSO, et al, 2007, p.7; CSO, et al, 2014, p.199.

According to 'the 2011-2015 National HIV and AIDS Strategic Framework,' launched in 2010, ... *four national priorities for tackling the epidemic [were emphasized]... the first priority [was] to accelerate and intensify prevention in order to reduce annual rates of new HIV infections...* (CSO, et al, 2014, p.6). According to the same report, *the proportion of women and men with knowledge of HIV prevention methods increases with age, with youth aged 15-19 having the lowest level of knowledge* (CSO et al, 2014, p.198), in addition, the same groups was reported having the lowest HIV prevalence

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