

Gender, HIV/AIDS and The Status of Teachers, Report of the Third Commonwealth Teachers' Research Symposium, Mozambique, 2008. Commonwealth Secretariat, 2008. 72 pp., £15.00.

Review by Dr Stephen Bigger, University of Worcester.

Of 33.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS, two thirds are in Africa. There are nine million orphaned children in commonwealth Africa. Children are vulnerable, and teachers are therefore in a very difficult position. This commonwealth conference is reported as five sessions, dealing with teacher mobility, the impact of HIV/AIDS of education and teachers, and strategies for using research to improve education. Three out of six appendices offer additional details. In Kenya, training teachers in AIDS awareness and then working with parents has contributed to a fall in infection rates from 14 % to 5.1%. More women than men are infected, but women are mostly infected by men (the figure of 7-1 is quoted).; in this violence against women plays a not insignificant part. There is a teacher shortage, and AIDS deaths of teachers account for an annual 4% loss. Stigma plays a part: to admit to having aids could potentially risk a teacher's job.

These statistics are of course shocking. Three series of recommendations were made: about HIV/AIDS itself; about the status of teachers; and about commonwealth teacher recruitment.

On HIV/AIDS, teachers with HIV/AIDS should be offered treatment and be involved in HIV/AIDS teaching programmes; their pensions should be available to their dependants on death; and teaching about HIV/AIDS prevention should be scaled up.

On the status of teachers, salaries should be protected and unqualified parateachers not used to replace them. Funding should be secured for education. More local teachers should be recruited and trained. Unqualified and underqualified teachers already in post should be upskilled. There should be a proper collective bargaining system. Teachers' pay should be made regular and on time, perhaps through national electronic payments. Other conditions of service should be improved, including measures to attract teachers to rural areas. The teacher unions/associations should be strengthened. 'Crash' teacher training programmes should be avoided. And partnership between unions and external bodies should be augmented and strengthened.

On Commonwealth teacher recruitment, it was concluded that there should be more regulation; migrant local teachers should be encouraged and enabled to return; teacher qualifications should be recognized internationally so good teachers do not have to seek other employment because their qualification and experience is not recognized; and governments who siphon off local teachers should pay compensation. The Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol is in place to protect teachers.

This report carried the proceedings of the conference, and the text of the Keynote paper by Professor Michael Kelly. It was especially noted that supportive words are often not followed up with action and implementation of changes, often because the issue was placed on the caseload of junior staff. The need for partnership, including international partnerships, is the dominant message I take away from these Proceedings. A supposed

flu pandemic in Europe caused billions to be spent and wasted in panic. The huge numbers and human tragedies involved in this real pandemic should be at the top of world government priorities.

Dr Stephen Bigger,
University of Worcester.