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Introduction

HIV and AIDS remains the greatest threat to sustainable human development for Zimbabwe. Its impact has increasingly become complex and affect all economic and social sectors. The impact range from declining life expectancy, fall in economic productivity, and poor investment in education and health. This chapter examines the emergence of the HIV and AIDS epidemic and how the education system has responded to the challenge and become a critical force in fighting against the pandemic. The chapter proposes a conceptual framework for the impact of HIV and AIDS on education and mapping the processes through which the education sector is affected. It also examines the available evidence of the impact of the AIDS epidemic on education.

The Background

HIV and AIDS became a cause for serious concern in Zimbabwe and the sub-region in the mid 1980s because of its devastating impact on the citizenry of the region. No epidemic in human history had ever caused such devastation. It became imperative for people to be educated on the impact of that disease, its causes, prevention and treatment. It was strategic that education systems became the vehicle for educating people about the disease. Vast resources were ploughed into HIV and AIDS education programmes and every social service sector was expected to play its part. Although the focus of this chapter is on HIV and AIDS and Education, it should be pointed out that the dynamics of population growth also impacts on the spread of the disease. Countries that are unable to control population growth risk chronic and severe poverty. Given the fact that resources are finite, the need to institute effective strategies to control population growth nationally, regionally and internationally became urgent. Education curricula began to experience new inputs on HIV and AIDS education as policy planners in governments and civil society sought to mitigate the impact of this deadly disease on uncontrolled population growth and development. What was even more frightening was the realisation that all of a sudden, the disease was exploding relentlessly and numbers of the affected were correspondingly intensifying. No one was safe. Infants, youths and adults were all potential victims.

That realisation became the driving force in the government's crusade against the devastating impact of HIV and AIDS on development. Zimbabwe took a leading role in the region, firstly by expanding the education system and using available public and private sector networks to achieve results. A vigorous battle was beginning to unfold. Secondly, local government structures at district, provincial and national levels were