

Executive Summary

From 19 to 21 February 2008, researchers from Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Zambia participated in the third Commonwealth Teacher Research Symposium organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat in collaboration with Education International (EI), the umbrella organisation that represents the world's teachers' unions. They exchanged findings on gender, HIV/AIDS and the status of teachers. The symposium was held in Maputo, Mozambique — the first time it has taken place outside the UK.

The meeting was opened by Ms Maria Albertina da Conceição Bila, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Mozambique, who highlighted the role that teachers are playing in countries combating HIV/AIDS. In Kenya, where infection rates fell from 14 per cent in 2000 to 5.1 per cent in 2006, 10,000 teachers have been trained in AIDS awareness and have carried the message to 400,000 parents.

In his keynote speech, Professor Michael Kelly of the University of Zambia pointed out that HIV infection rates in the Commonwealth are twice the world average and that there are 9 million orphaned children in African Commonwealth countries. He argued that HIV reflects the subordination of women and violence against them.

Mr Dennis Sinyolo, EI Education Co-ordinator, reported on a survey of six Commonwealth countries — The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia — which found that the average rate of loss of teachers from AIDS was 4 per cent, and that with an acute shortage of teachers in most areas it would be difficult for these countries to achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In lively exchanges the participants focused on issues such as:

- ◆ The need to overcome stigma, so that education workers are not afraid of AIDS testing or of losing their jobs if they test positive;
- ◆ The need for positive support, including financial help and food allowances, for sufferers and their families;
- ◆ A recognition that while only a minority may be infected, everyone is affected;
- ◆ An understanding that HIV/AIDS hits women hardest — a woman is seven times more likely to catch the disease from a man than vice versa, and 61 per cent of all adults infected are women;
- ◆ The role of peer educators in helping to overcome stigma and of teachers in changing community attitudes.

At the conclusion of the symposium, it was decided that a report, which would include a compilation of the proceedings and selected research papers, would be circulated to all ministries of education in the Commonwealth, teachers' unions and other interested partners.