

# USING OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF EFA AND THE MDG GOALS: CASE OF “THE PEDAGOGIC DRUM” IN CAMEROON

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## Abstract

One of the Millennium Development Goals outlined strategies to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. According to Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS Statistics (2010) Cameroon's HIV/AIDS infection rate stood at 5.81%. Of its population of 10,493,700 people, an estimated 610,000 people were infected with HIV. From 2001 to 2009, there was 127.083% change in the rate of infection among the population. An estimated 37,000 people die each year from HIV/AIDS in Cameroon. The data further suggest that there were approximately 330,000 orphans living in Cameroon because of HIV/AIDS. Worried about the situation, the Government of Cameroon and her partners have been working relentlessly to combat the diseases. Some of the strategies used in combating the disease are media sensitisation, free screening, free provision of antiretroviral drugs and more recently the use of open distance learning programmes through the radio to deliver learning content to teachers of primary and secondary schools. The objective of this paper is to describe how the Ministry of Basic Education in Collaboration with donor organisations have developed an open distance learning radio programme entitled “The Pedagogic Drum” to trained teachers on techniques of inserting HIV/AIDS education into regular subjects of the school curriculum. Additionally, the paper discusses the structure of the content, delivery strategies, support system and feedback mechanisms. The targeted population are Regional Pedagogic Inspector Coordinators of Basic Education responsible for implementing, monitoring, evaluating and reporting to the central coordinating unit of the programme located in the Ministry of Basic Education. The data was collected through interview and analysed using inductive approach. The outcome indicates that many teachers now integrate HIV/AIDS education in their everyday classroom practices. Many learners are now aware of how HIV/AIDS is transmitted, how it can be prevented and how to live with infected and affected persons.

## **Introduction**

In 2010, the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that almost 70% of the 33.4 million adults in the world infected with HIV live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cameroon's HIV prevalence rate estimated at 5.1% was the highest in the West and Central Africa sub-region. The National AIDS Control Committee/Central Technical Group (NACC/CTG) estimates that there were 141 new HIV infected persons per day in Cameroon, which means six newly infected persons each hour, every day (Cameroon Demographic & Health Survey, 2011). The AIDS pandemic slows economic development efforts and represents a serious threat to Africa and Cameroon particularly.

To halt the devastating effects of its epidemic, Cameroon expanded HIV/ AIDS treatment, care, support services and is currently working hard to reduce mother-to-child transmission and other new infections among the general population and most-at-risk groups (Cameroon Demographic & Health Survey 2011). Although the response to HIV/AIDS is not a short term issue, the government, civil society, and international partners are using various strategies to develop a sustainable national response. One of such strategies is the introduction of HIV and Aids education in the school curriculum. The objective of this paper is to describe how the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education in Collaboration with donor organisations have developed an open distance learning radio programme entitled "The Pedagogic Drum" to train teachers on techniques of inserting HIV/AIDS education into regular subjects of the school curriculum (Republic of Cameroon, 2013). Additionally, the paper discusses the structure of the content, delivery strategies, support system and feedback mechanisms.

## **The Devastating Nature of HIV/AIDS**

According to Cameroon Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2006), in 1990 there were fewer than 32,000 HIV-positive Cameroonians. By 1995, the number of people living with HIV (PLHIV) increased more than eight times to 264,000 and in 2010; the number was estimated at 560,000 HIV infected persons (Cameroon Demographic & Health Survey 2011). Of the infected persons, the number of babies estimated to be born HIV positive due to mother-to-child transmission was 7300; adult HIV prevalence rate (population ages 15–49) also increased from 0.6% in 1990 to 5.1% in 2010. Women were more likely to be HIV positive than men. Roughly three in five (60%) PLHIV are women. At such growth rates, there will be about 726,000 PLHIV in Cameroon by 2020 (National Aids Control Committee & Central Technical Group Report, 2010). Additionally, the report uphold that Young women represent seven in 10 (70%) of all youth ages 15– 24 who were HIV positive. The number of children orphaned by AIDS that is children under age 18 who have lost one or both parents to AIDS increased dramatically, rising from 13,000 orphans in 1995 to 304,000 in 2010. By 2020, this number is projected to rise to 350,000. Children orphaned by AIDS represent about 25% of Cameroon's total 1,200,000 orphans in 2010. The National Aids Control Committee and Central Technical Group Report (2010) observed that about 90% of new infections were estimated to occur as a result of sexual relations, multiple partners, and non-use of condoms. Approximately 6% of new infections are from mother-to-child transmission, and roughly 4% of new infections come from blood supply and other accidental transmissions.

The impact on the education sector has led to the loss of teachers and greater absenteeism among teachers due to HIV-related illnesses. There has also been a decrease in public financing of education due to the increased funding needed for the fight against HIV (National Aids Control Committee & Central Technical Group Report, 2010). Increased poverty at the family level with limited resources available for children's education due to household income, loss is no exception. Notwithstanding, the majority of infected people do not know they are infected and hence may not take precautions to protect their partners. Stakeholders believed that family life (FL), population issues (PI) and HIV/Aids education in the school curriculum will significantly contribute to providing a sustainable solution to the deadly pandemic.

## **Introduction of Family Life, Population Issues and HIV/AIDS Education in the School Curriculum**

In the year 2000, Cameroon instituted the fight against HIV/AIDS in the strategy paper for the reduction of poverty (The World Bank, 2010). The education sector was brought on board in 2004

when the government and her partners thought it necessary to target the school milieu with strategies that can lead to a reduction in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS (Republic of Cameroon, 2013). Family Life (FL), Population Issues (PI) and HIV/AIDS education in the school curriculum has as objectives to:

- Sensitise the Cameroonian youths on the need to cultivate adequate social and moral behaviour as pre-requisites for a healthy life in contemporary society;
- Develop the youths' knowledge on population issues and the multiple crises generated by health and environmental issues; and
- Eradicate prejudices and taboos that surround sex education and HIV/AIDS.

These three objectives were translated into teachable units under FL/ PI/ HIV-AIDS Education in the primary and secondary school curricular. A teaching guide for teachers was also developed to facilitate the teaching of the module by the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education with the support of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

### **Teachers Pedagogic Guide**

A pedagogic guide was developed by experts of the two Ministries of Education in collaboration with UNESCO to facilitate the integration of FL/ PI/ HIV-AIDS Education in classroom practises. The document provide suggestions on how: teachers can adapt the content to the level of the learners; learners can be engaged in collaborative learning approaches while keeping abreast with recent discoveries in HIV/AIDS and innovations in pedagogic practises. It encourages teachers to strengthen leadership skills, life skills, self-confidence, negotiation techniques and decision making skills in learners as a pre-requisite for the fight against HIV/AIDS. Additionally, the guide suggests a focus on communicative and subject approach in mainstreaming FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education content in host subjects. Communicative approach encourages the active participation of learners in instructional processes while the subject approaches recommends a clear link of FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education content with real life situations.

### **Implementation FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Curriculum**

FL/PI/HIV/AIDS has been part of the primary and secondary school curriculum since the two Ministers signed Order No 287/07/MINEDUB/MINESEC of January 2007 integrating it in the school programme. To ensure that both teachers and learners take the course seriously, the order instituting the FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education in the school programme instructed that it should be tested in both school based assessments and certificate examinations (Republic of Cameroon, 2007). The course implementation adopts a cross curricular approach in which the content is passed on through some host subjects such as biology, citizenship, moral education, environmental sciences and history etc. The host subjects were chosen because of their affinity with FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education and the role the courses play in shaping the moral and the social values of the learners. Additionally, the curriculum suggest that insertion of FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education into a host subject can either be full insertion (content of FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education and host subject are identical); partial insertion (when content of FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education is partially identical with host subject) and insertion by adjunction (when content of FL/PI/HIV/AIDS does not correspond to the host subject area).

Since the introduction of the subject in the school curriculum, the impact in learners' social and moral behaviour was not very significant. The reason advanced in the slow change of learners' behaviour was that teachers had difficulties mainstreaming FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education content in host subjects (Republic of Cameroon, 2013). To overcome this challenge, the Ministries of Education in collaboration with UNESCO developed a distance learning programme for teachers of primary and secondary schools.

### **Description of the Target Population**

The targeted population for the open and distance learning (ODL) programme are primary and secondary school teachers. The primary school teachers are holders of the Grade One Teachers Certificate. Being labelled as a Grade One teacher entails that one must have completed a Teacher Training Course from any of the authorised Teacher Training Colleges owned either by the

government or the private sector. Some of the Grade One Certificate holders did a one year training programme, others two year and yet another category did a three year training programme depending on entry qualifications. The Entry qualifications are the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level obtained after five years of Secondary Education; a Certificate of Probation obtained after six years of secondary Education and the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level obtained after seven years of secondary education.

The secondary school teachers are holders of an equivalent of a Bachelor Degree in Education or a Master's Degree commonly referred to as DIPES I or DEPES II.

### **Objectives of the ODL Programme:**

The objectives of the ODL radio broadcast programme are to:

1. Train participants on effective techniques of organising learners in work groups;
2. Illustrate to participants, effective techniques of inserting FL/PI/HIV-AIDS Education in host subjects of the school curriculum;
3. Train teacher participants on diverse strategies of engaging learners in interactive discussions;
4. Collect accurate data using a checklist designed for the follow-up of learners' performance.

### **Course Description**

FL/PI/HIV-AIDS Education was developed by experts of the concerned Ministries of Education in Collaboration with UNESECO. The content is made up of 24 slots of 10 minutes each radio broadcast training package recorded in English and French by some National Pedagogic Inspectors of the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education. It is broadcast once a week with a rebroadcast over the weekend. The programme is structured to empower teachers with techniques of inserting FL/PI/HIV/AIDS module in some host subjects of the school curriculum. Given the diversity in learners' profile, the content is well simplified to meet individual teacher-participants needs with provision for further support from a local coordinating team. It is currently being piloted in 148 schools in five out of the ten Regions of Cameroon notably: the East, Littoral, North West, West, and South West Regions.

### **Delivery of FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Curriculum Using the Radio**

Prior to the launching of the programme in 2012, workshops were organised in participating Regions to train administrative and pedagogic staff on how to listen to FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education radio broadcast using the free play wind up solar powered radio sets put at the disposal of each school. At the training workshop, participants were also drilled on how to organise teachers into groups, listen to the radio broadcast and conduct group discussions based on the delivered message. The workshops equally reinforced pedagogic supervisors' skills on how to use the FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education syllabuses and pedagogic guide (Republic of Cameroon, 2013). Participants were also trained on how to collect data via a checklist designed for the follow-up of teachers' performance after listening to the radio broadcast. At the end of the workshops, each pilot school was provided with the solar powered radio sets at a ratio of 6:1.

The FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education radio programme is broadcast once a week during school hours with a re-broadcast during the weekend in both English and French languages. Each slot last for 10 minutes. At the school level, teachers were informed of the broadcast time, which coincide with the long break period. On the broadcast day, a lead teacher ensures that colleagues are clustered around the radio set to listen to the topic of the day. After every broadcast, they interact amongst themselves on how the day's topic can be mainstreamed in lesson plans. In case of any doubts, the views of the Regional Coordinator of the programme are sorted immediately in a face-to-face session or through a telephone conversation. The topics treated in the slots included:

- the impact of HIV and aids;
- different stages of the development of HIV in the body;

- education on treatment, serology status and treatment centres;
- vulnerability and HIV risk factors;
- the impact of HIV/AIDS on society;
- the fight against discrimination and stigmatisation in the domain of HIV/AIDS;
- mainstreaming the different topics in host subjects of the school curriculum.

### **Support System**

At the Regional level, Pedagogic Inspector Coordinators were designated to coordinate the programme in schools and report to the Inspectorate General of Education every three months. These Coordinators supported teachers in clarifying their misconceptions in the integration of FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education content in lesson plans; and in the monitoring of learning outcomes among students. The analysed data collected during the programme indicates that out of the 24 slots programmed for the academic year, about 80% of the schools participating in the pilot phase of the programme were able to listen to all the 24 slots; 10% of the schools listened to 20 slots; 6% listened to 17 slots and 4% listened to 14 slots (Republic of Cameroon, 2013). The schools that could not listen to all the slots complaint of poor reception due to weather conditions; broken receivers due to poor handling and uncharged receivers at the time of broadcast. They however recommended that all the slots be put on a Digital Audio Disc so that they can use it for the continuous professional development.

This notwithstanding, 85% of teachers from the participating schools reported that they can now mainstream FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education content in lesson plans. They appreciated the discussions that followed every radio broadcast session and the support received from the coordinating team. A majority of the participants (80%) said both the radio broadcast session and the pedagogic guide put at their disposal contributed enormously in strengthening their knowledge, skills and attitudes on how to engage and coordinate discussions amongst their students. They concluded that discussing sex education among various categories of students is no longer a taboo as it was the case in the past years. Parents who followed most of the radio slots greatly appreciated the programme and remarked that it enabled them to grab strategies on how to engage a discussion on family life, sex and HIV/AIDS discussions with their children at home.

### **Conclusion**

The 24 radio broadcast sessions through Open and distance learning programme entitled “The Pedagogic Drum” covering the FL/PI/HIV/AIDS Education has contributed enormously in shaping students social and moral behaviour. 85% of the teachers reported that it can be observed amongst students that much attention is given to sex education lessons. They also indicated that there are limited conflicts between male and female students especially when it comes to games and classroom activities initially perceived as good only for males or females. Students developed a keen interest in participating in sketches related to FL/PI/HIV/AIDS education. This change in social and moral behaviour has led to students being more conscious of the fact that HIV/AIDS is real with the highest rate of infection resulting from poor sexual habits. They are also aware of preventive measures and how to live with infected persons.

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