

*Final draft*



**UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education  
UNESCO Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific  
UNESCO Office of the Regional Adviser for Culture in Asia and the Pacific**

**UNESCO REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR HIV/AIDS  
IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION  
2003-2007**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This document aims to serve as a strategic focus for UNESCO's activities related to HIV/AIDS in the Asia and Pacific region and the work of 14 UNESCO field offices. It builds on strategic directions set out in the document, "UNESCO's strategy for HIV/AIDS preventive education", which was published in April 2001 and on lessons learned from the UNAIDS/UNESCO project, "A Cultural Approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care." Inputs from all sectors of UNESCO Bangkok, as well as inputs from all field offices and headquarters.

In the UNESCO preventive education HIV/AIDS strategy document, five core tasks were identified: advocating at all levels, customizing the message, changing risk behavior, caring for the infected and the affected and coping with the institutional impact of HIV/AIDS. This current strategy has deemed it necessary to repackage these important tasks and present them in relation to three UNESCO sectors: Education, Culture and Social and Human Sciences (SHS). It is envisaged that the Science sector will also be involved in the future. The main reason for this is that at least these three sectors must become fully engaged in responding to HIV/AIDS.

By designing a strategy with three components, focusing on Education, SHS and Culture, and using the five core tasks mentioned above as cross-cutting themes, it is hoped to achieve both an increased involvement of all UNESCO sectors and a better understanding of and cooperation among the UNESCO sectors in responding to HIV/AIDS.

Giving each sector a distinct, visible strategic 'assignment' will make the response to HIV/AIDS by UNESCO truly multi-sectoral and therefore more systematic and effective.

## **BACKGROUND: HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific**

The Asia-Pacific region is the world's largest and most diverse in terms of geography, population, political and economic systems, societies and cultures. Although HIV/AIDS rates are lower here than in Africa, data show that prevalence rates are rising, partly due to behavioral and socio-cultural (including gender) vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS that are present in many societies. With its large populations, the potential scale of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Asia is catastrophic. As the Malaysian statement at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on AIDS noted: "The impending epidemic in Asia and the Pacific will far surpass anything previously seen if nothing is done today."

The region has 60% of the world's population, but – so far less than 20% of the estimated global total of HIV infections. UNAIDS estimated that there were an estimated 970,000 new infections in Asia and the Pacific in 2002, bringing the total number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS to 7.2 million. The region's HIV epidemics are diverse – Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and some states in India have shown 2-3% adult HIV prevalence, while countries such as Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka continue to show low rates. However, throughout the region geographic pockets and vulnerable subpopulations of much higher HIV prevalence reveal the potential for extensive spread in the region. Although HIV/AIDS affects both men and women, women are more vulnerable because of biological, social, cultural and economic factors.

With the exceptions of Australia, New Zealand, Cambodia and Thailand, the region's HIV epidemics continue to grow, and some explosively. HIV prevalence reported among sex workers in Mumbai, India, rose from 1% to over 50% between 1987 and 1993, and is now estimated to be 70%. Similar explosive spread among populations of injecting drug users (IDUs) has been documented in Malaysia, Nepal, Vietnam, some states in India, some provinces in China, and more recently in Indonesia. If these epidemics continue to grow and spread unchecked, the Asia-Pacific region will soon surpass the number of HIV infected people recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa. Recent projections by the CIA suggest that this may happen as early as 2010.

The region has serious behavioral and societal vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS. Rapid economic growth, highly mobile populations, and changing sexual norms fuel the demand for sex work, which is a frequent component of the sexual culture in most Asian countries. Throughout the region, for several reasons, governments and communities are reluctant or refuse to acknowledge the existence of sex workers, injecting drug users, male-to-male sex, and transgendered people. They prohibit or discourage discussions about sex and drug use, especially among women and young people.

As a result, a large majority of people in the region (especially women and girls) do not have access to the information, skills, tools, and the supportive environments needed to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI); to voluntary HIV counseling and testing; to harm reduction; or to the medications needed to treat HIV, STI, and opportunistic infections associated with AIDS, such as tuberculosis. Currently, in most countries in the region, HIV epidemics have not yet spread beyond specific vulnerable population groups. However, population mobility between countries occurs on a scale larger now than at any other time in human history. Such large-scale population movement can accelerate the spread of HIV from initially infected population groups to other sections of the community and around the region.

Stigma attached to sex, death and drug use, lack of access to prevention and treatment, and extensive population mobility all make the continued growth of the HIV epidemics in the Asia-Pacific region a stark reality. In turn these will create an AIDS crisis with severe social, economic, and political consequences.

This document outlines the strategic directions that UNESCO will follow in responding to HIV/AIDS within three broad fields of activity: Education, Culture and Social and Human Sciences (SHS). A fourth field of activity – Science – needs to be developed in due course.

### **Situation and Response analysis**

For an overview of the HIV epidemic in the region, this strategy refers to the latest epidemiological information on the UNAIDS website ([www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org))

An overview of relevant responses in the fields that concern UNESCO may be developed at a later stage. Information on UNESCO's regional HIV/AIDS response will be posted on its website.

### **UNESCO's strategic response to HIV/AIDS: Education, Culture and SHS**

The **Dakar World Education Forum** (April 2000) recognized comprehensive school health as a key element in the broad vision of Education For All as an inclusive concept taking into account the needs of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including children, young people and adults affected by HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health. More importantly, in Dakar, the global community recognized the need to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a matter of urgency. By affecting the demand, supply and quality of education, HIV/AIDS was seen as an immense challenge to the education sector, and as already undermining progress towards the goal of Education For All (EFA) by the year 2015. As the lead agency for the Dakar follow-up, UNESCO has made a commitment to putting HIV/AIDS as the highest priority in its follow-up strategies and actions. Two of six inter-agency flagship programmes in the Dakar follow-up focus on HIV/AIDS: AIDS, School and Education, and the FRESH Initiative "Focusing Resources on Effective School Health."

#### ***UNESCO's Preventive Education Strategy for HIV/AIDS***

UNESCO's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic seeks to combat complacency, challenge stigma, overcome the tyranny of silence about the epidemic, and promote more caring attitudes towards people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. In cooperation with UNAIDS co-sponsors, Member States, civil society partners (especially NGOs, Youth and community based associations), media and the private sector, UNESCO's contribution to the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemics concentrates on: Integrating HIV/AIDS preventive education into the global development agenda and national policies, adapting preventive education efforts to the diversity of needs and contexts, encouraging responsible behaviour and reducing vulnerability.

The Global Strategy (developed in April 2001), puts forward that fighting the epidemic through preventive education is no single entry-point programme. UNESCO's priority in preventive education is directed towards five core tasks:

1. Advocacy at all levels;
2. Customizing the message;
3. Changing risk behaviour;
4. Caring for the infected and the affected; and
5. Coping with the institutional impact of HIV/AIDS.

More information on UNESCO's Global Strategy for HIV/AIDS Preventive Education, as well as other Regional Strategies are available on the internet:

<http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/strategy.pdf>

This mandate guides UNESCO's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in three important main fields: Education, Culture and SHS.

#### ***Education***

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Since HIV causes a disease that has so far no medical solution (in terms of a vaccine against it or a medicine to cure it), the best way its spread can be stopped is by changing the behaviors that put people at risk of infection with HIV. Since most behaviors are socialized, education is the key to prevention of HIV/AIDS. Since attitudes and values are also strongly related to education, it can also help reduce discrimination against women, vulnerable groups and persons living with HIV/AIDS. Strategically promoting preventive education is

therefore a key component of UNESCO's mandate in responding to HIV/AIDS (see UNESCO's Strategy on HIV/AIDS Preventive Education, April 2001); all levels of education will be targeted, from early childhood care and basic education to higher education. Promoting preventive education also fits the goal of Education for All (EFA) that was agreed upon during the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000.

In most countries in the region, there is a strong need to build the capacity of Governments (including Ministries of Education) to respond to the epidemic. This should start with advocacy, followed by the development of planning and policy documents (including a Capacity Building Plan). Activities may include training of Ministry staff, and further down the line extensive training of teacher trainers and teachers on skills-based preventive education principles and teaching methods.

Appropriate, gender-sensitive tools for preventive education need to be developed or adjusted. This should be conducted by Ministries of Education, with the help of UNESCO and other cosponsors and with close involvement of National AIDS Programs, NGOs (in particular women's organizations) as well as other Ministries. Furthermore, it is important that skills-based preventive education programs are delivered to target audiences including in-school and out-of-school youth and hard-to-reach populations, both literate and illiterate. Therefore, the focus of preventive education should extend beyond the Ministry of Education to include other ministries.

Needless to say, gender imbalances play a major role in the spread of HIV/AIDS and in the way it impacts on people affected by the epidemic. Therefore, a gender-sensitive approach throughout preventive education and impact alleviation measures will ensure a better result.

Preventive education programs should be designed using an approach that takes the culture (norms, values, attitudes, language, knowledge) of target audiences into account, as well as more structural aspects (gender, class, ethnicity). This social science-based approach has been developed as a joint project of UNESCO and UNAIDS under the title 'A cultural approach to HIV/AIDS prevention and care' (1998) – see below under *Culture* and under *SHS*.

Ministries of Education also need to start planning for the impact of the epidemic on their education systems. This includes planning for the loss of teachers, a decrease in demand for education due to increased non-enrollment and drop-out, not least among girls, as well as stigma and discrimination against AIDS-affected teachers, administrators and students. It should be realized that this impact is not equally distributed among all individuals involved – a heavier impact is likely to occur on women and girls. Working to guarantee access to education for teachers and students affected by HIV/AIDS will also help UNESCO accomplish goals set by the Education For All Forum and the Millennium Declaration.

#### OVERALL PURPOSE IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The purpose of preventive education is to promote health and prevent disease by providing the knowledge, the attitudes, the skills and the means to foster and sustain behavior that reduces risk, improves care and lessens the impact of illness.

## KEY STRATEGIES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

1. Advocate at all levels
  - Within UNESCO, advocate for a larger allocation of funds to preventive education through core budgets and for a stronger UNESCO focus on HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific
  - In collaboration with UNAIDS cosponsors and the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS, conduct advocacy activities at the highest possible level to ensure commitment and action taken by Ministries of Education and related Ministries, including sufficient budget allocation for HIV/AIDS responses
  - Advocate with senior policy makers and influencers for the introduction or strengthening of gender-sensitive HIV/AIDS preventive education and sex education, and for their concurrence with capacity building efforts
  - Develop and improve methods and tools to assist in advocacy efforts to promote HIV/AIDS preventive education, for example the Partner Forum on AIDS and Education
  - Advocate with senior policy makers and influencers to ensure students, administrators and teachers affected by HIV/AIDS have access and equal opportunities in the mainstream education system, and assure that inputs of people living with AIDS are given due consideration
2. Strengthen the response to HIV/AIDS of Ministries of Education and other Ministries related to Education in the region
  - In coordination with other key partners of the Ministry of Education, develop or adjust an education sector strategic plan for responding to HIV/AIDS, based on the National Strategic Plan
  - In collaboration with key partners of the Ministry, develop a capacity building plan, based on goals and objectives set in the strategic plan on HIV/AIDS for the education sector
  - Conduct regular training and information sharing activities for key Ministry of Education / other Ministry staff in order to strengthen preventive HIV/AIDS education as well as the care and support of people affected by AIDS and related issues to reduce stigma and discrimination
  - Strengthen assessment, monitoring and planning capacity regarding the anticipation of the impact of AIDS on the education sector
  - Provide technical assistance in the development of Ministerial plans, regulations and tools related to HIV/AIDS
3. Develop, promote and improve methods, tools and the implementation of HIV/AIDS preventive education, including sex education, for young people and vulnerable groups
  - In coordination and collaboration with UNICEF, UNFPA and other UNAIDS cosponsors, develop, promote and improve gender-sensitive methods and tools for HIV/AIDS preventive education, including manuals, text books and teaching materials, for formal, informal and non-formal education settings, and for literate and illiterate audiences, following a culturally appropriate approach (see below)
  - Work with teacher training colleges and other training institutions to integrate gender-sensitive HIV/AIDS preventive and sex education into teacher training curricula, and monitor their implementation
  - Support the implementation of culturally appropriate in-school and out-of-school preventive education interventions

- Support targeted preventive education interventions for hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups including ethnic minorities and mobile populations
- Integrate gender-sensitive HIV/AIDS related content into other training programs (i.e. adult / distance education courses, literacy campaigns)
- 4. Maintain a resource center and clearinghouse for collecting information and materials related to experiences, interventions and best practices in the field of preventive education for repackaging into various formats and for dissemination to different user groups
- 5. Help alleviate the impact of AIDS on the education sector
  - Support interventions aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination of persons living with / affected by HIV/AIDS, including teachers and students
  - Develop and support interventions aimed at preventing children and young people affected by AIDS (especially girls) from dropping out of the education system
  - Assist in the development of gender-sensitive regulations, policies and interventions to alleviate the impact of AIDS on teachers, administrators and students
  - Support the inclusion of care and compassion for persons affected by AIDS into the school curriculum at all levels
  - Maintain or improve the quality of education in areas heavily affected by the epidemic
  - Work on promoting child and girl friendly school environments free of harassment and violence

## **Culture**

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Culture<sup>1</sup> shapes individuals, including their norms, values, attitudes and behaviors, and in turn individuals shape their own culture. If behaviors need to be changed – as is the case in the time of AIDS - norms, values and attitudes need to change at the same time. It is for this reason that working on cultural expressions and cultural productions, incorporating positive and relevant HIV/AIDS and related behavior change messages in it, is of utmost importance. No less important, it is important to make sure that current and future interventions are tailored to the culture and society of the persons to whom these interventions are directed.

UNESCO has a special role to make sure that ‘the message gets across’ by assuring cultural and linguistic appropriateness – not only in its own interventions, but also in those of other agencies. This includes applying a ‘culturally appropriate approach’ while working with the education sector – ensuring that teachers’ and students’ needs and concerns are addressed in the right tone and using the right language. (See UNAIDS/UNESCO documents related to ‘a Cultural approach to HIV/AIDS prevention and care’, 1998-2000)

### OVERALL PURPOSE IN THE FIELD OF CULTURE

The purpose of a culturally appropriate approach to HIV/AIDS is to improve the effectiveness of both HIV preventive education interventions and interventions to

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Culture’ here refers to a shared and learned system of meanings, values, beliefs and attitudes – not only to culture as a set of expressions of art or literature.

alleviate the impact of AIDS by integrating cultural and societal factors influencing the target audience into these interventions.

### KEY STRATEGIES IN THE FIELD OF CULTURE

1. Advocate at all levels
  - Advocate for a higher budget allocation within UNESCO for HIV related culture interventions and for a broadening of UNESCO's role on HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific
  - Advocate with other UNESCO sectors (especially the Education sector), UN agencies and other partners to ensure that they conduct appropriate assessment research which takes the culture and background of their target populations into account while designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating their interventions
2. Strengthen a 'culturally appropriate approach' in HIV/AIDS prevention and care
  - Further develop and promote (including translation and launches in new countries) the guidelines for designing and implementing interventions following a culturally appropriate approach
  - In collaboration with key partner agencies, support the development of culturally and linguistically appropriate information related to HIV/AIDS for target populations, including minority and other vulnerable groups
  - Conduct ethnographic and other research to inform policy makers and intervention designers, especially on marginalized groups
  - Support innovative use of cultural expressions to convey HIV/AIDS related messages, especially when fostering a positive attitude towards safer behaviors or towards persons living with HIV/AIDS
  - Support innovative use of cultural traditions / expressions to address gender imbalances that increase HIV vulnerability
3. Maintain a resource center and clearing house for collecting information and materials related to the culturally appropriate approach for repackaging into various formats and for dissemination to different user groups
4. Alleviate the impact of HIV/AIDS by strengthening 'cultural safety nets'
  - Advocate for support of 'cultural influencers' (movie stars, soap stars, pop stars, sports stars etc) to help reinforce and shape positive cultural norms and values about persons living with HIV/AIDS and about the need to support them
  - Help to find ways in which there are 'safety nets' in cultures that can be mobilized to alleviate the impact of HIV/AIDS, with a special focus on children – for example by strengthening notions of compassion and solidarity
  - Promote cultural expressions in which there is a compassionate and non-stigmatizing portrayal of persons living with / affected by HIV/AIDS

### Social and Human Sciences

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HIV/AIDS interventions need the social and human sciences to provide information at the start of their programs, in the form of ethnographic, behavioral, epidemiological and other scientific data. This is a prerequisite to ensure that interventions are 'tuned' to their target audiences. In monitoring and evaluating interventions, and in drawing up

lessons learned, a scientific approach is needed as well. Only when there is a cycle of data collection, analysis, and input of lessons learned into HIV/AIDS interventions, ensuring that the people designing and implementing interventions listen to their target audience, will we be able to catch up with the changing face of the epidemic and the changing needs of the populations it affects.

UNESCO has a role to play in strengthening research capabilities in the countries it supports and in ensuring that data collection and analysis occur throughout the implementation of major HIV/AIDS interventions. One way of ensuring this is to build the capacity of universities and research institutions in developing countries, and to foster and strengthen links between national AIDS programs / councils / authorities and universities / research institutions, at a national and a regional level.

### OVERALL PURPOSE IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

The purpose of work in the field of social and human sciences is to help make HIV/AIDS prevention and care interventions more effective and to improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

### KEY STRATEGIES IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

1. Advocate at all levels
  - Within UNESCO, advocate for a larger allocation of funds for SHS activities related to HIV/AIDS through core budgets and for a broadening of UNESCO's role on HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific
  - Advocate for more qualitative and quantitative research on HIV/AIDS with key policy makers and donors, for a better quality of research methods and approaches
  - Advocate with donors and governments for the need to improve the involvement of research institutions in the response to HIV/AIDS
  - Share best practices of projects that have based their success on taking a 'culturally appropriate approach' to preventive education
  - Within the UN Theme Group, advocate with other UN agencies for improved qualitative assessment research, better performance monitoring and outcome evaluation
2. Strengthen the use of scientific data in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS related interventions
  - Help other UNESCO sections conduct good quality research in assessing, monitoring and evaluating its and its partners' interventions
  - Collect and share information related to HIV/AIDS in the region
  - Strengthen links between research institutions and National AIDS Programs, ensuring stronger cross-fertilization
3. Maintain a resource center and clearing house for collecting information and materials related to experiences, interventions and best practices in the field of HIV/AIDS for repackaging into various formats and for dissemination to different user groups
4. Improve the capacity of institutions of higher education on monitoring, evaluation and research related to HIV/AIDS
  - Work with key partners (including FHI, PATH, MEASURE, UNAIDS) to provide technical and financial support for key research institutions and universities in the region to improve their capacity to conduct research for

assessment, monitoring and evaluation, using both qualitative and quantitative measures

- Organize relevant courses, workshops and exchanges for staff working on research in HIV/AIDS
- Facilitate the establishment of partnerships between universities in developing countries and those in developed countries to develop curricula and supportive learning and teaching materials, as well as train students in conducting research in the field of HIV/AIDS in developing countries
- Organize regular general or specialized forums for social scientists in the field of HIV/AIDS to meet and exchange views

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Modes of operation**

UNESCO will not work on its own but in multi-agency and multi-sectoral partnerships. It will also work in partnership within and across government sectors and with civil society and the private sector.

### **Guiding Principles**

In this light, when implementing its strategic plan, UNESCO will be guided by the following principles:

1. UNESCO will adopt a strong advocacy role for broad issues relating to HIV/AIDS within its mandate. It will underline the linkages between HIV/AIDS education, poverty eradication, overcoming the disadvantages and disparities experienced by women and girls, the understanding and practice of human rights, the cultural and traditional context and understandings, and the achievement of the EFA, and UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS goals and targets.
2. UNESCO will strengthen engagement with and support to regional, sub-regional and national institutions involved in HIV/AIDS capacity building.
3. UNESCO will also work in partnership with other government agencies, United Nations agencies, multilateral and bilateral agencies, Regional Organisations such as SEAMEO, UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Teams, and international and local NGOs, for the improved coordination of efforts in support of locally owned plans and strategies for responding to HIV/AIDS.
4. When dealing with education ministries UNESCO will ensure that its support for HIV/AIDS education accords with the financial, management and programme framework of a country's sector-wide approach (SWAP) and educational sector plans, above all those relating to the attainment of the EFA goals, as well as with the planning and strategic framework of an education ministry's own HIV/AIDS unit.

### **Plan Implementation and UNESCO Structures**

In implementing UNESCO's strategic plan for HIV/AIDS education in the Asia Pacific region, the different UNESCO's modes of presence - Headquarters, Institutes (especially IIEP, IBE, IICBA, UIE and UIS), the Asia Regional Bureau for Education, and National Field Offices will work in close collaboration.

In countries where there is no UNESCO office, much will depend on the dynamism of the local National Commission for UNESCO. Efforts will be made to strengthen cooperation with the National Commissions.

The Bureau of Field Coordination (UNESCO/Paris/BFC) will facilitate interactive partnership between Field Offices and Headquarters by carrying out functions that are both upstream (policies and strategies) and downstream (coordination, monitoring and reporting). More importantly, it will assist Field Offices in taking on increased managerial autonomy.

The role of the Coordination Unit at UNESCO IIEP in Paris is to coordinate UNESCO's HIV/AIDS programmes and projects funded both from its ordinary budget and from extra budgetary sources. In this capacity, it will be responsible for ensuring the overall coherence of the UNESCO programme in the field of HIV/AIDS and for inter-agency coordination within the framework of UNAIDS.

### **Resources**

Ability to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic depends greatly on the mobilisation of significant resources. Additional human and financial resources are needed for the implementation of the strategic plan. UNESCO will seek to mobilise provision for these from budgetary and extra-budgetary sources. It will also support efforts for the vigorous mobilisation of funds from global, regional, sub-regional and national sources.

### **Action Plans**

The strategic plan does no more than outline broad directions for UNESCO in supporting national HIV/AIDS responses that would help countries reduce the rate of HIV infection, strengthen them in the provision of care and support, and enable them to mitigate the institutional impacts of the epidemic. Subsequently the UNESCO field offices in Asia and the Pacific will be asked to translate elements of the strategic plan that are relevant to their circumstances into detailed action plans outlining specific objectives, activities, actions, outcomes, responsible parties, time-frames and budgets.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

UNESCO Bangkok will establish appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that objectives are being met and progress is being made along the directions proposed in the strategic plan. The strategy will be subject to an annual review process led by the UNESCO Bangkok office.