

A Proposal for the Establishment of Regional Consortiums of HIV/AIDS Centres

*Jacqui Ala, Elif Gurtunca & Michelle Small
Department of International Relations
University of the Witwatersrand,
South Africa*

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Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria, Canada
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Summary

In Africa, HIV/AIDS is most prevalent within the 15 – 24 year old age group; this cohort is thus, the focus of many HIV/AIDS programmes. The majority of these programmes, however, are based at the secondary school level. There is a gap in programmes targeting youth ages 18 – 24 year — those enrolled in tertiary institutions. Unfortunately, a lack of awareness, ignorance, stigmatisation, prejudice, and most significantly, a lack of funding is preventing tertiary institutions from confronting the problem of HIV/AIDS, although recently some institutions have begun to do so. Yet institutions with HIV/AIDS initiatives often lack the capacity and financial resources to meet effectively the diverse educational, social, psychosocial, and medical needs of students.

The establishment of regionally based Consortiums of HIV/AIDS Centres is aimed at addressing the problems that currently impede the creation or expansion of student focused HIV/AIDS programmes at the tertiary level. These regional Consortiums will seek to guide, monitor, and provide assistance as well as funding to key tertiary institutions. Their primary function will be to assist in the establishment of new student HIV/AIDS centres and to support existing centres. It is envisaged that these regional Consortiums will be owned and led by their respective African tertiary institutions with input from their students, regional governments and the donor community.

To date there is no formal regional coordinating or facilitating body exclusively focused on assisting African tertiary institutions in mounting a response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic among their students. The establishment of regional Consortiums would address this omission. Although some tertiary institutions have launched effective HIV/AIDS student programmes this is not the norm. Presently too few African students have access to HIV/AIDS programmes at the institutions where they are studying at. This fact is evident by the increasing prevalence rates among the youth in African states. Thus, it is imperative that the youth continue to be a focal area for HIV/AIDS projects and programmes. Ignoring the specific HIV/AIDS needs of young people will have severe socio-economic implications for African states. The creation of regional Consortiums

represents an effective way of allowing tertiary institutions to rapidly and effectively meet the HIV/AIDS needs of their students.

Initially this initiative will be piloted among tertiary institutions in Southern Africa, and, if proven successful, it will be expanded to other regions in Africa. It is recommended that each region have its own independent functioning Consortium, as a continent wide Consortium would be enormously bureaucratic and consequently less efficient. Furthermore, regional Consortiums would also be more effective as the profile of the pandemic differs from region to region.

Each regional Consortium will guide, monitor, and provide assistance, as well as funding to key tertiary institutions in each region. It will have a mandate to:

- assist in the establishment of HIV/AIDS Centres for the prevention, support and treatment programmes at institutions where no such programmes exist;
- support institutions that already have HIV/AIDS Centres for the prevention, support and treatment programmes, and to expand such programmes;
- advise the HIV/AIDS Centres on the construction and implementation of student HIV/AIDS programmes;
- create and deliver training programmes for faculty members, peer-educators, HIV/AIDS counsellors;
- create curricula and guidelines for student HIV/AIDS education;
- create facilitative processes to encourage students to participate in the establishment of such programmes and to utilise their services;
- facilitate the exchange of information among the Centres on best practices with respect to preventing, support and treating HIV/AIDS; and
- facilitate exchange programmes among African tertiary institutions and Centres so that educators and students can see how other such institutions are dealing with HIV/AIDS in this context.

Each regional Consortium could be initially instituted as a loose network of cooperation among tertiary institutions. If this proves to be effective, a more formal institutionalised arrangement could be created with the consent of its members. However, it is imperative that the structure of the regional Consortium be designed and agreed to by the tertiary institutions comprising it. The primary role of the Consortium is to advise, assist, share information and best practices, and raise funds; it will in no way dictate to tertiary institutions how to create or run their student based HIV/AIDS programmes.