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**MAINSTREAMING HIV/ AIDS INTO THE CURRICULA AND MAJOR INSTITUTIONAL  
ACTIVITIES OF HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN ETHIOPIA:  
THE CASE OF GONDAR UNIVERSITY  
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**Abstract**

*Despite a great deal of efforts, curative medicine or efficacious vaccine for HIV/AIDS epidemic remains elusive. In such dire circumstances, prevention through educating people about the pandemic is one of the first-rate strategies to limit the spread and the untold impact of the epidemic. For HIV/AIDS prevention activities to be effective, it is compulsory to mainstream HIV/AIDS education in programmes and institutional plans. In light of this, the main objective of this paper is to assess the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS into the curricula and major institutional activities of the University of Gondar. To meet this objective, data were collected from 1,200 students and 85 teachers (by using questionnaire) who were selected by employing stratified random sampling technique and from 5 University officials (by using semi-structured interview) who were selected by using purposive sampling technique. Besides, document analysis is also used. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data. Results of the study revealed that mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS both in the curricula and institutional activities of the university found to be less satisfactory. Hence, the researchers recommended that the university has to re think to mainstream HIV/AIDS in to the curricula of the different departments and in its major institutional activities; teaching and learning, research and community service and partnership formation.*

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**Background**

HIV/AIDS is perhaps the first known pandemic in human history to turn in to a new global human threat just in a couple of decades (Else & Kutengule, 2003). It is clear that HIV/AIDS epidemic today is considered as one of the most pressing development and security problems in the world. HIV/AIDS has left virtually no country/rich or poor/ untouched. Africa, however, has the highest incidence of HIV infection in the world (SAT, 2004). That is out of the total of 40 million people living with HIV, 95 percent are said to be residing in the developing world and among these 71 percent are found in sub-Saharan Africa. The rate at which the epidemic is spreading is also much higher in the region (UNAIDS & World Bank, 2001). In sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia

is one of the worst-hit countries by the epidemic. One of the devastating consequences of the pandemic is that it affects the productive and skilled youths on which the country invested its resource much. To make a significant contribution to reverse the spread and mitigate the impact - the risk and vulnerability caused by the epidemic, there should be a comprehensive approach in place. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic is closely linked to development and education issues, coordinating responses are essential principles of comprehensive approach in addressing the risk, vulnerability and impact of HIV/AIDS. A comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS entails a combination of HIV/AIDS focused works and mainstreaming them into the different activities of various sectors.

Education and HIV/AIDS are inextricably linked. On the one hand, the education sector is severely threatened by HIV/AIDS since the pandemic incautiously affects teachers, administrators and students. Hence, the chances of achieving crucial education goals set by the international community are brutally threatened by HIV/AIDS. On the other hand, global commitment to strategies, policies and programmes that are designed to minimize risk, vulnerability and impact of HIV/AIDS will not be met without the full contribution of the education sector (SAT, 2004). Educating the public through incorporating HIV/AIDS education into the curricula is not a recent phenomenon in other nations such as Nigeria and India. In some countries giving certificate, postgraduate diploma and Master's degree on HIV/AIDS has become a common panorama (Foster & Miwinyemvua, 2004). In view of these, the purpose of this study is to delve into the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS education into the curricula and major institutional activities of the University of Gondar.

## **Objectives**

### **General Objective**

The general objective of this study is to assess the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS education into the curricula and major institutional activities of higher institutions.

### **Specific objectives**

More specifically, the research is designed to:

- Investigate the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in the curricula of departments at the University of Gondar;
- Examine the University's practice on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in major institutional activities such as research, community outreach and partnerships, and
- Give possible suggestions based on the findings of the study.

### **Definition of Term (S)**

**Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS:** It is a process that enables development actors to address the causes and effects of HIV/AIDS in an effective and sustained manner, both through their usual work and within their workplace (UNAIDS and World Bank, 2001). It means, «Wearing HIV/AIDS glasses» while working in Universities at all levels.

**Risk:** It is determined by the individual behavior and situations such as multiple sexual partners, having unprotected sex, sharing needles when ejecting drugs or being under the influence of alcohol when having sex or having untreated sexually transmitted diseases (Holden, 2004).

**Vulnerability:** Stands for an individual's or communities' inability to control their risk of infection due to factors that are beyond the individual's control. Such factors could be poverty, illiteracy, gender, living in rural areas, being refugee, etc (Ibid)

Impact: It is about long term changes HIV/AIDS can cause on an individual, a community or societal level. HIV/AIDS not only impacts the physical and mental health of individuals but also a full blown epidemic also changes socio-cultural structure and traditions and impact on economies and money of different sectors (Ibid)

### **Research Methodology**

The research mainly employed a descriptive research design in a sense that it attempted to describe the practice of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in programmes and plans of the University of Gondar.

### **Participants, Sampling Techniques and Sample Seize**

Students, teachers and officials in the university – 1290 in number participated in the study. 1,200 student and 85 teacher respondents were selected by using stratified random sampling technique. We used the faculty to which students and teachers belong as strata and we chose the actual proportionate number of respondents from each faculty randomly. University officials, obviously, should be included in the study and five of them were respondents.

### **Instruments**

A questionnaire was used to collect data from teacher and student respondents. The items in the questionnaire were designed in such a way that they could be understood by respondents unequivocally. This was done during the pilot test .The questionnaire had more of close ended items, but sporadically open ended item were included so as to enrich the data and give freedom for respondents to spell out what was in their mind. The questionnaire had a total of 21 items for both teachers and students.

Apart from the questionnaire, we also used semi- structured interview as a tool of research in order to get the data required from university officials. Also document analysis was used in order to substantiate the findings obtained from primary sources. The content validity of the questionnaire and the interview items were checked by professionals in the area.

## **Results and Discussion**

### Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into the curricula and Senate legislation of the University of Gondar

The results showed that 181 student respondents (15%) reported that they took courses about HIV/AIDS and discussed about HIV/AIDS as a chapter or sub- topic in other related courses. On the part of teachers, 37(43%) of them admitted that they had discussions about HIV/AIDS with their students. According to the teachers, they discussed the epidemic out of their personal motivation, interest and concern. Otherwise there is no existing frame work or structure in the university that could enable them to engage in such endeavours.

The University of Gondar has 36 departments, which are currently giving training for regular, extension, and summer-in-service students. Nonetheless, 5 departments did not finalize the newly/recently introduced curricula revision. The researchers, therefore, meticulously scrutinized the curricula of 31 departments to check the extent to which they have incorporated HIV/AIDS. The result of the analysis of the curricula backs up the results found by the questionnaire from teachers and students. This is because only two departments, Law and Psychology, integrated an independent course on HIV/AIDS. Other 13 departments have incorporated the issue of HIV/AIDS as a

sub-topic or a chapter in a course. We had also looked into the existing legislation to examine what it says about HIV/AIDS as a whole and mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in particular. Based on the analysis of the legislation, the researchers found out that the issue of HIV/AIDS is only mentioned in article 39.5(39.5.5) under the public service section and states that, ‘the university will play its own role in the effort of combating HIV/AIDS.’ But it does not mention how the university could fight the pandemic in a comprehensive approach- by mainstreaming it.

All in all, on the basis on the responses of teachers, students and the documents, the curricula and the senate legislation, it is safe to conclude that the issue of HIV/AIDS is not sufficiently mainstreamed in the existing curricula and other important documents of the University of Gondar. This might be due to the fact that HIV/AIDS is perceived as the responsibility of the health sector, and not of the university and /or HIV/AIDS strategic plans and activities, by the health sector, might be viewed as isolated activities rather than being mainstreamed. Or it might be due to difficulties in working with others, logistical or ownership reasons. However, it is worth noting that the university may have a comparative advantage to respond to and limit the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate the impact of the epidemic.

Gondar University’s practice on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in its major institutional activities: research, community outreach and partnerships

Mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS should happen in the internal sphere (related to the organization/work place) and with the external sphere (related to the cooperation work) (SAT, 2004). Research undertakings and community services, among others, are internal spheres, whereas partnership formation is an external sphere.

## Mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in Research

As plainly explained in the legislation of the University, the University academic staff is expected to spend 25% of his/her time in research. To this effect, staff engaged in research have 3 credit hours less load than those who are not. Besides, to strengthen the culture of research, Gondar University gives research grants annually to the researchers and researches. HIV/AIDS could be one such research areas.

Table 1 Researches conducted by scholars in the university since 1991 till 2000 Ethiopian calendar.

Year	No. of researches approved by Research & Publications (RPO)	Researches approved on HIV/AIDS	
		NO.	%
1991	13	0	0
1992	31	5	16.1
1993	16	0	0
1994	19	2	10.5
1995	14	2	14.2
1996	14	3	21.2
1997	15	1	6.6
1998	36	3	8.3
1999	21	1	4.7
2000	16	2	12.5
Total	195	19	9.7

As depicted in the above table, for the last 10 years, only 9.7 % of the researches executed were in connection with HIV/AIDS. This is highly surprising for the



University which has a teaching hospital and has been training medical doctors and other health science professionals for more than 50 years. In the last ten years, the maximum number of researches done on HIV/AIDS is 3 (21.2%). As the issue of HIV/AIDS is a number one social, political and economic problem, the tax payers' money should have been basically utilized in researching about HIV/AIDS.

### **Mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in Community Outreach/Service**

Giving community service is equally important with that of conducting research and is given focus in the legislation of the University. This means staffs are urged to be engaged in community outreach and enlighten the community on varieties of issues of concern. Except providing VCT service to the community, the University does not engage in sensitizing the community about the risk, vulnerability and impact of the epidemic in a systematic ways. Nevertheless, there are attempts to raise public awareness about the disease by students, particularly medicine and health science students, while they are assigned for practical attachment. Analysis of the interview with officials and the questionnaire from the teacher respondents, it is possible to understand limited capacity and infrastructure are stumbling blocks for not giving community service.

### **Mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in Partnership Formation**

Commitment and active support of decision makers are very crucial for mainstreaming partnership formation. That means decision makers of the University and partner institutions should take the lead to facilitate joint commitment of all collaborators in order to reverse the impact caused by the epidemic. The essence of partnership is having an alliance so that members of the alliance would have shared responsibility. Results from the interview with officials depicted that the university has partnership

with three organizations, which are working in HIV/AIDS; namely Mhiber- hiwot, CDC and IPAS. Though this is an encouraging beginning, it is not sufficient as the University needs to have more partners in the external sphere- both within and outside the country.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In accordance with the findings of the study, it seems possible to conclude that mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS education into the curricula and major institutional activities of University of Gondar is found to be less satisfactory. And hence the researchers recommend that the University has to rethink to consider the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in the curricula and the major activities: teaching and learning, research and community service and partnership formation.

UNAIDS and World Bank (2004) have given a frame of reference/ steps to mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in to institutions irrespective of their kind. The frame work is so flexible it could be used almost in all institutions including universities. Thus, we, the researcher annexed it so that anybody interested could make use of it in order to mainstream HIV/AIDS.

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