

Concern Over HIV in Schools Rises

By AMENYA OCHIENG

Education Minister Prof Sam Ongeri has expressed concern over the high prevalence of HIV/Aids in schools.

He said the pandemic was a drawback to the gains made by the government in implementing free primary school education.

Prof Ongeri said the HIV/Aids continues to be a major factor in hampering Africa's efforts in evolving from an agrarian-based society into a knowledge-based society.

Speaking during the opening ceremony of the Eastern Africa Region High Level Forum on Education for all in a Mombasa Continental Hotel, the Minister said although the HIV prevalence rate in the country had dropped from 14 per cent in 1989 to 6 per cent in 2010, more awareness initiatives were needed to lower the prevalence levels.

"As we participate in this forum, participants need to bear in mind the threat posed by HIV/Aids to the achievement of Education for All goals and to the development of Sub-Saharan Africa," he said.

He decided the impact of HIV/

Aids on educational demands, noting that the most affected age cluster is 14-35 years, which bears the bulk of one's school going years.

He also noted that the quality of education in the continent has been affected by the disease markedly by the loss of experienced teachers, education experts and administrators, who are critical to the advancement of quality education in the region.

Prof Ongeri, also expressed concern over the continued stigmatisation of infected and affected teachers and students, he advised that the representatives of various countries in the forum need to put in place programmes that sensitise various publics on HIV/Aids.

"Programmes to control and reduce the spread of the virus must make maximum use of education's potential to transmit messages on prevention and to change attitudes and behaviors," he advised.

He said the low cost of antiretroviral drugs (ARV's), had made the disease manageable, citing teachers and students who were now able to procure the drugs affordably.



Minister for Education Prof Sam Ongeri (left) chats with the Acting Director General, Unesco France, Dr Qian Tang during the Eastern Africa High Level Forum on Education for All held at the Mombasa Intercontinental Resort. PHOTO: George Ochieng