

School-in-a-bag reduces drop-out rates

November 28 2011

A more flexible approach to teaching methods and better community support could reduce school drop-out in high HIV-prevalence areas in sub-Saharan Africa. Findings from a project led by London's Institute of Education and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for International Development (DFID) show that using new ways of encouraging young children to stay in regular schooling cut drop-out rates by 42 per cent in just a year.

Researchers used a package of measures to help [vulnerable children](#), such as [orphans](#) and the very poor, who were at higher risk of abandoning [school](#). Drop-out rates are higher at the end of grade one but to use these measures successfully, intervention starts in grade six. These included helping the [children](#) do more of their schoolwork from home, getting local people involved in their [education](#), and helping schools become more inclusive.

The fact that many children do not complete a basic primary education is a major development obstacle for countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Governments in the region have committed to targets aimed at changing this by 2015 as part of the United Nations' (UN) Millennium Development Goal for Education. But the UN has warned that the targets could be missed unless more is done to help poor and vulnerable [learners](#) stay in school and move through the year grades.

"The success of the Malawi project shows that change is possible, if children and schools are given the help they need," said Professor Pat Pridmore, an international development specialist from the Institute of

Education and the leader of the study. "In just a year, the schools and communities we worked with cut the number of children dropping out of primary school by almost half."

Professor Pridmore's team encouraged class teachers to keep a register of children who might stop coming to school and developed a 'school-in-a-bag' pack so they could keep up with their learning outside the classroom. These packs contained study guides, textbooks, pens and notebooks.

Vulnerable children were allocated a 'school buddy' to support them and encourage their learning. They were also invited to weekly youth club meetings where they could do their homework and get further help from youth leaders, who were also given a 'school-in-a-box' pack to help the children. These packs included books, games, a football and a wind-up radio. Professor Pridmore's team advised school managers on better ways to monitor attendance and attainment so they could more accurately identify the children at risk of dropping out. And they helped schools to introduce counselling and guidance sessions for children who were falling behind.

"There is potential to implement the measures that worked in this project at more schools in Malawi and to extend it across the region, but this will be difficult unless education budgets are increased", said Professor Pridmore. A rough calculation suggests that the measures used in Malawi would cost less than US\$8 per child for a year. This is on top of the approximately US\$20 per child currently spent on [primary education](#), one of the lowest amounts in the region.

"Our research shows that you can break patterns of educational inequality and disadvantage if you help vulnerable children while they are still at primary school. But it requires an integrated strategy, including better teacher education and national policies," said Professor

Pridmore.

"The ideas that worked so successfully in Malawi need to be implemented as a package. If you try to cherry pick just a few of them to keep the cost down, or fail to adapt them to local needs, they are far less likely to be effective."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

Citation: School-in-a-bag reduces drop-out rates (2011, November 28) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-school-in-a-bag-drop-out.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.