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## EDITORIAL

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# SCALING UP THE RESPONSE

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## TO HIV/AIDS WITHIN

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## EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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*Cecilia Braslavsky and Inon Schenker*

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The AIDS epidemic situates education as a core, independent, strong and vital factor in preventing the spread of a virus that has killed more people than the last two world wars put together.

Some practitioners and researchers have begun to discover more about what works in preventive education. The educational community is also constantly learning more about barriers that hinder the diffusion of HIV/AIDS education into formal and non-formal educational institutions.

Lessons of successes and failures are, however, still not well shared around the world. Research about AIDS education in formal education in the South is still weak and only recently have more voices been heard advocating the need to enhance work on education for HIV/AIDS prevention, starting with pre-adolescents and following it right through to college and university level.

This issue of *Prospects* is an attempt to help highlight the voices of advocacy, the concerns, the research findings, the barriers as well as the success stories of education for HIV/AIDS prevention in formal education.

We are privileged and honoured to have received contributions for this special issue from leading experts and research groups from several countries, as well as from the Minister of Education of Brazil and the Ministry of Education of Thailand.

UNESCO's voice on HIV/AIDS is guided by the organization's Director-General, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, who placed the fight against HIV/AIDS among the Organization's top priorities. Mr Gudmund Hernes, UNESCO HIV/AIDS Co-ordinator, whose viewpoint opens this special issue, provides insights to the organization's strategy and its translation into action.

The three papers on the Moslem, Christian and Jewish views provide an exceptionally important insight that further enlarges the cultural perspective on education for HIV/AIDS prevention.

Paradoxically, education often neglects the students. In combating HIV/AIDS, it has been learned that without the active involvement of students (and parents) in developing interventions and (in some cases) implementing them (as in the case of peer educators) there is little chance of success. The guest editor of this special issue has insisted on adding the voices of young people from around the world—next to the voices and experiences of African teachers, needing to cope with both the challenges of educating the young for protection and prevention and for the loss of peers, who are dying in growing numbers.

Looking back and paying tribute to a man whose fingerprints are still visible in most current actions in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, we remember in this issue of *Prospects* the late Professor Jonathan Mann, who died with his wife in a tragic accident, bringing to a stop the life careers of both Jonathan and Mary-Lou Clement-Mann in the search for an AIDS vaccine and for ways of changing the course of the epidemic.

In June 2001, the United Nations Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) concluded with an agreement to 'ensure that by 2005, at least 90% of young men and women aged 15 to 24 have access to the information and education necessary to develop the life skills required to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection.'

Knowledge, education and skills are keywords in education for HIV/AIDS prevention. In many countries affected by HIV/AIDS these are being provided in separate and isolated 'projects'. Although this phase is extremely necessary and important, this approach might not be sufficiently useful in the long-term effort to influence the attitudes and behaviours of young people.

The educational community must find ways to integrate the lessons learned from these projects into current curricula in a way that will provide all students with the essential skills

and knowledge to protect themselves, not only from HIV/AIDS but also from any other disease—today and in the future. This means a double emphasis: on one side, on education for HIV/AIDS prevention as a current disease; and on the other, on the core educational goals of respecting the other and ourselves, practising life-skills, protecting human rights and learning to read and to be able to understand messages about life and protection.

The editorial Board is grateful to Dr Inon I. Schenker,<sup>1</sup> the guest editor of this special issue of *Prospects* which is meant to make another step in the direction of scaling up the educational response to the AIDS epidemic.