



STRENGTHENING THE WORLD OF WORK RESPONSE TO HIV AND AIDS

Since its estimated global peak in 1999, new HIV infections have fallen. Data from around the world clearly show that steady progress is being made towards the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Furthermore, the evidence is clear that prevention and treatment are working.

Yet further progress can be made. HIV continues to weigh heavily on affected populations – and more needs to be done. For example, in 2009 alone, there were an estimated 2.6 million new HIV infections and 1.8 million AIDS-related deaths among adults and children. Although new infections have – indeed – fallen, the total number of persons living with HIV and requiring ongoing treatment continues to increase and reached the figure of 33.3 million in 2009.

Every day, two-thirds of all the people living with HIV and AIDS go to work. For many this provides a livelihood and the hope of a decent future. The workplace can also be a vital source of life-saving information on both HIV prevention and treatment. But this is not the case for everyone: employees may face stigma and discrimination from employers and fellow workers; they might lose their job; and they may face challenges with regard to accessing HIV prevention information or treatment. Often laws to protect persons with HIV are not actively enforced; in some cases, there are even punitive laws affecting those with HIV.

HIV and AIDS at the workplace is an issue that can undermine every aspect of the ILO Decent Work Agenda – with a marked impact on workers, their families and dependants, enterprises, and national economies.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Partners:

The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID)

Beneficiary countries:

Senegal, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Paraguay, Guyana, Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic and Haiti

Timeframe:

September 2011 – April 2012

Budget:

USD 2,500,000

THE RESPONSE

The ILO is the lead United Nations agency for HIV and AIDS policies and programmes in the world of work and private sector mobilization. The ILO programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work plays a key role in the global HIV responses through workplaces.

This project, the second phase of a partnership between OFID and the ILO, contributed towards reducing the incidence of HIV in 12 countries by means of effective world of work responses. In order to achieve this, the project focused on two key interventions tailored to the socio-economic conditions that increase HIV risks and vulnerabilities by country and economic sector:

(i) Developing national, tripartite HIV workplace policies for key economic sectors of participating countries, in accordance with the key principles of human rights, gender equality and non-discrimination, which are outlined in international labour standards;

(ii) Building the capacity of governments, and employers' and workers' organizations, to develop enterprise-level workplace policies and programmes within key economic sectors.

RESULTS

The programme demonstrated the value and cost-efficiency of workplace contributions to national HIV responses – both in regard to policy development and implementation, and at the individual level for treatment adherence and behavioural change for HIV prevention.

The programme covered key economic sectors such as fisheries, manufacturing, maritime, mining, postal, rubber plantation, tourism, export processing and transport. Overall, 13 national sectoral and one national HIV workplace policies were developed, and more than 1.6 million persons in 12 countries benefited from the project.



“For people who live with HIV it is very difficult to get employment. Many companies require proof of the HIV-free status of a candidate worker. This is why initiatives such as this project, which work directly with the labour sector, are essential in protecting the rights of people with HIV.”

Delmi Medina,
National Association
of People Living with
HIV and AIDS

Specific examples of results include:

- Successful advocacy for the inclusion of Haitian migrant workers in the national HIV workplace policy in the Dominican Republic. This was particularly relevant due to the large number of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic after the country’s earthquake;
- Support for the development of a tripartite national rubber plantation workplace policy endorsed and launched by the President of Liberia;
- Agreement of the Sierra Rutile Mining Company to provide support for the continued implementation of the HIV workplace policies through company workplace programmes, following the end of the programme in Sierra Leone. This programme had achieved an unprecedented level of treatment adherence (close to 100 per cent) in prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission and in anti-retroviral therapy;
- The development of a Honduran national policy through tripartite social dialogue was the first post-coup event, which brought the Government, workers and the employers to the same table. They collaborated on the common concern of HIV in the workplace, and began rebuilding peace and a foundation for dialogue on other issues;
- The piloting in Senegal of HealthWISE – an ILO-WHO tool to improve the occupational safety and health of health workers – in partnership with the Ministry of Health, leading to its adoption as a national quality assurance tool for health service facilities;
- A baseline assessment on HIV stigma, discrimination and the reduction of homophobia and transphobia, was carried out by the land transport sector in Paraguay. This was the first of its kind in South America and inspired further research on the topic



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BENEFITS OF PARTNERING

The ILO has renowned expertise in many work-related sectors, including occupational safety and health and social security. It has conducted comprehensive research on the impact of HIV/AIDS in the world of work, resulting in an array of resource materials, manuals, and guides for programming.

Effectively designed HIV/AIDS programmes at the workplace increase levels of sustainable employment. The willingness shown by enterprises in this project – and in others – bears witness to their positive impact.

The programme has helped governments to develop effective policies to combat HIV/AIDS, in particular at the workplace, thereby strengthening their national economies.