



International  
Labour  
Office  
Geneva

## Botswana trade unions put HIV high on the agenda

“As a membership-based organization, our collective bargaining power comes from our numbers - the more members we have, the louder our voice. Therefore, we cannot afford to lose even one worker to a disease as preventable as AIDS,” says Gadzani Mohotsha, Secretary General of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU). “As the leadership of BFTU, we must build on the trust of our members to negotiate agreements with employers to educate and protect workers against stigma and discrimination”.

The BFTU has a membership of about 120,000 workers from 32 affiliated organizations. With HIV prevalence so high in the country and many members and their families affected by the epidemic, the federation has put the issue high on its agenda and is actively working to make HIV a workplace issue.



*BFTU peer educators in an ILO training session*

With support from the ILO's Strategic HIV/AIDS Responses in Enterprises (SHARE) programme, the Federation has developed a five-year HIV/AIDS strategy, which focuses on improving access to

prevention, voluntary counselling and testing, treatment and support services for its members – these are rolled out at workplace level by a team of peer educators. The ILO has helped with training on the rights of workers living with HIV and employment HIV-related discrimination, together with skills-building sessions on the inclusion of provisions related to HIV in collective agreements.

From 2005 to 2007, the SHARE programme worked with 16 partner workplaces from the construction, retail, textile and tourism sectors, covering close to 9,000 workers. In each of these workplaces, workers' representatives alongside the managers play an important role in developing the HIV policy and programme of the enterprise.

### Getting the HIV message through to all

Murray and Roberts, one of Botswana's leading construction companies, has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the ILO and has successfully incorporated HIV into the company's occupational safety and health (OSH) programme. “The nature of the construction industry increases the vulnerability of workers to HIV,” says Dineo Koontse, Health and Safety Manager. “Construction work is based on site so there is really no permanent workplace. The high mobility of workers separates families and so there is a risk of multiple sexual partnerships resulting in increased vulnerability to HIV”.

As a result of ILO staff training, Murray and Roberts has been able to develop an HIV/AIDS policy and a comprehensive programme. Koontse is supported by a team of 17 peer educators including some based with local suppliers.

She has established women's committees in all company sites as forums to discuss issues of HIV/AIDS and gender. These create a conducive environment to educate women on their rights and empower them to say 'no' to unsafe sex. She has been asked to share the knowledge acquired during her collaboration with the ILO project to help Murray and Roberts

set up its HIV workplace policy and programme in neighbouring Zimbabwe.

With HIV mainstreaming well established, OSH staff were concerned to ensure that they were meeting the needs of workers with low literacy levels. The industry employs many people who can't be reached by conventional print messages. Koontse looked for a new medium of communication, instead of print, and as a result the company has expanded its regular morning "tool box talks" on workplace safety to include HIV. Now the peer educators use the opportunity to kick off the day with an HIV message and a chat.

### Survey shows reduction in discrimination

The ILO's SHARE programme has been extended with funding from PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) and it recently carried out a survey to measure the impact of the project. It found that the implementation of workplace services and policies coupled with awareness-raising work had resulted in a significant reduction in workers' fears that they could be dismissed or be denied promotion because of their HIV status.

### "HIV/AIDS - Related Discrimination"



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