



International
Labour
Office
Geneva

South African unions back HIV response in the workplace

A big fruit processing company in South Africa's northern Limpopo province used to lose at least one worker a month to AIDS. Many others were often sick or absent, but widespread stigma in the small rural community meant that no one would talk about HIV or admit to being infected. Deeply concerned about the well-being of its workforce, the management of the company began an HIV education programme that has helped to create a significant turnaround in staff attitudes and behaviour towards the epidemic. Two years on, 194 workers felt comfortable enough to come forward for voluntary HIV counselling and testing, fearing no discrimination.

The company concerned – African Reality Estate – had linked up with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Strategic HIV/AIDS Responses in Enterprises (SHARE) programme, funded by the US Department of Labor. The ILO provides technical support, including training, materials and advice, to help workplaces develop HIV policies and programmes in collaboration with its tripartite constituents – government, employers and workers.

“Our employees want to know much more about HIV and AIDS since we have become involved in this programme with the ILO,” says Wilhemina Malatjie,



Wilhemina Malatjie, HIV/AIDS Focal Point, and two other workers from African Reality Estate

HIV/AIDS focal point for African Reality Estate. The company's HIV programme is guided and coordinated by a committee made up of management and two unions, one of which is an affiliate of the main national union federation, COSATU.

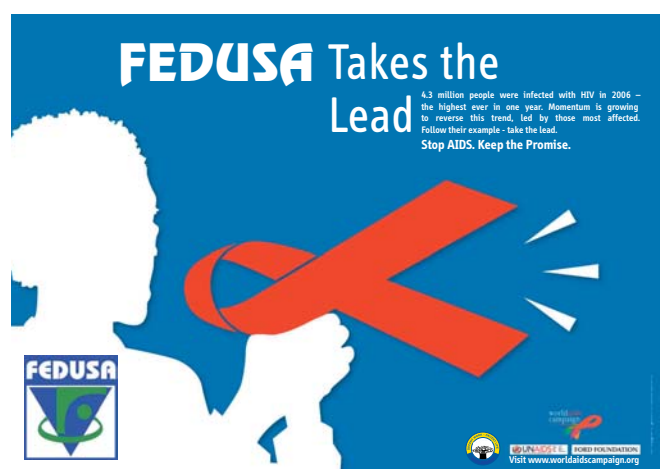
The involvement of COSATU reflects growing concern at national level at how the epidemic is affecting the workforce and union members. South Africa has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world with an estimated 5.7 million people living with HIV in 2007 (18.1 per cent of them are adults aged between 15 and 49 years). The majority of workers in the organized sector of the economy are members of one of the three main labour federations in the country - COSATU, FEDUSA and NACTU - which between them have a total paid-up membership of nearly three million people. The trade unions have taken a strong position in response to the epidemic and embarked on joint campaigns to reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS on the world of work.

The three federations started working closely with the ILO at national level in 2004, and have been involved in widespread training and capacity building at leadership and workplace level since then. They have set up a network of HIV peer educators at workplaces, chosen because they have the trust of colleagues, and trained them in techniques to advise and inform others about HIV risk and prevention.

Through this initiative they have been able to reach more than 500 members. The process of developing and implementing HIV workplace policies and programmes has been particularly successful when integrated in the work of existing Health and Wellness Committees, made up of management and labour unions.

In 2006, the trade unions were part of the national process that helped to develop the HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infection National Strategic Plan 2007–2011. The unions are taking part in a

consultative workshop in November 2008 with the ILO to finalize their joint contribution to the national plan. The process is expected to be completed in early 2009 once the plan has been adopted and submitted to the South African National AIDS Council.



HIV poster produced by the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), to commemorate World AIDS Day

Helping the transport sector

With funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the ILO is working on a countrywide project to prevent HIV and reduce its impact in the transport sector. In close cooperation with key organizations, including the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), the project has helped develop a National Strategic Plan for the transport sector, trained 25 peer educators in Limpopo province, and conducted a rapid needs assessment on HIV around crossborder areas followed by a national policy dialogue.

For further information please contact the ILO HIV/AIDS Focal Point for Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland:

Mr. Simphiwe MABHELE

mabhele@ilo.org

Telephone +27 12 431 8800

