

**APRIL, 2008**

**LAUNCH OF YORK FARM HIV&AIDS WORKPLACE POLICY.**

HIV and AIDS continue to be the major challenge of our time. The pandemic which currently affects about 16% of the Zambian population has had adverse effects on various sectors of the population.

The saddening fact about HIV and AIDS is that it mostly affects the youths, those of working age. This means that the country's human resource is greatly affected by this pandemic.

As the adage goes, "a healthy nation is a productive nation". In this context, one cannot understate the impact of HIV and AIDS on the productivity of a nation.

In response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, York Farm (YF), one of Zambia's leading growers and exporters of plants, fruits and vegetables, in collaboration with the ILO, developed an HIV and AIDS Workplace policy. The policy aims at providing guidance in the prevention of HIV and AIDS, and the mitigation of its impacts on the farm employees.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2008, the policy was launched at an occasion witnessed by several representatives of organisations working to fight HIV and AIDS, York Farm staff and management, ILO staff, and other invited guests.

Speaking during the occasion, YF Managing Director, Nigel Pollard, said YF management is committed to doing something about AIDS. Mr Pollard said the work place provides an effective ground to fight HIV and AIDS.

"It is now a recognised fact that the workplace is a battleground where the scourge of HIV and AIDS can be effectively fought and won", he said.

Mr Pollard said that YF management will strive to ensure that their staffs are well supported with information that is vital in making prudent behavioural choices, and also creating opportunities for access to treatment, care and support for staff that may be already living with HIV and AIDS.

Guest of Honour at the function, Labour and Social Security Minister, Honourable Ronald Mukuma, said the workplace is an important unit, for reaching out to a larger affected segment, thereby reaching out to a wider audience.

"The workplace is an important unit in the dissemination of information to affected segments", he said.

Mr Mukuma disclosed that Government in consultation with the employers and the worker's organizations has incorporated the issues of HIV and AIDS into Cap 268 of the laws of Zambia. He called for concerted efforts on the various stakeholders in collaboration with management to communicate policy information to the workers.

Mr Mukuma expressed sadness at the high levels of stigma and discrimination that still exist against people infected with HIV. "Government is saddened by high levels

of discrimination that still exist on the basis of status; it is important that we all fight such discriminatory behaviour”.

The Minister called on companies to have HIV and AIDS, policies and Programmes, adding that this would have a positive impact on the operations of the company. He added that Government would love to see programmes aimed at mitigating the effects of the pandemic. The Minister emphasised the need to safeguard the workforce.

ILO Country Director, Gerry Finnegan, expressed happiness at the fact that the efforts of the YF management in collaboration with the ILO had now yielded tangible results. Mr Finnegan said the ILO views HIV and AIDS as a workplace issue, hence its development of the global HIV/AIDS Code of Practice.

Meanwhile, National AIDS Council (NAC) Chairperson, Bishop Joshua Banda, said the policy was a sign that management recognises the threat that HIV has on workers and their families. He added that protecting the workers not only benefits the worker, but the employer as well. “Worker protection and mitigation offers mutual benefits to both the worker and the employer”, he said. Bishop Banda said the launch had come at a right time and to a properly selected grouping.

Also speaking at the same function, NAC Director General, Dr Ben Chirwa, expressed hope that other enterprises will learn and implement the YF idea. He called on individuals and the workers to apply the policy message outside the workplace.

[Click to view the policy.](#)