

Feature stories on HIV/AIDS and the world of work

06/02/2010

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Indian companies reach out to suppliers

Big corporate groups in India have the potential to extend HIV programmes beyond their direct employees and families to contractual workers, associates, partners and the companies in their supply chain. To tap into this potential, the ILO project in India has been carrying out advocacy work with large corporate houses to persuade them to scale up existing enterprise-based interventions.

“We attempted to mobilize employers’ organizations and enterprises and offered technical support to strengthen business response to HIV/AIDS in India. Several public and private sector companies developed their workplace policies and programmes, took up interventions among their supply chain, and also developed good models of Public Private Partnership (PPP)”, explains Afsar Syed Mohammad, Technical Specialist for the ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, previously Coordinator of the ILO project in India.

Apollo Tyres Limited (ATL) is a young, dynamic organization with manufacturing and sales operations in India and South Africa. ATL started its HIV programme working with truck drivers, and then initiated a comprehensive workplace programme in partnership with the ILO to cover its 7,000 employees in four locations. It is now helping to initiate HIV programmes among companies in its supply chain, targeting small and medium-sized business partners. It targets eight companies a year to set up workplace programmes, and plans to expand its HIV initiatives to involve 4,500 retailers across India through its 120 sales offices.

Onkar S. Kanwar, the Chairman and Managing Director of Apollo Tyres Ltd has been a key supporter of the initiative “HIV is recognized as a potential risk by the company for its key stakeholders and therefore its business. Proactive action to fight HIV is part of Apollo’s risk management framework.”

Many truck drivers are covered by the HIV prevention programmes set up by companies under models of Public Private Partnerships like the Apollo’s initiative. Bala Devi runs a dhaba (small tea shop) at Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar in Delhi. She is now a peer educator, who educates truckers who come to her dhaba as part of an intervention set up by Apollo Tyres.

Her perception about HIV has changed. “Initially, I would not allow Apollo’s workers to sit and discuss HIV and condoms in my dhaba. I thought it was shameful. But now I myself have become a peer educator. I talk about HIV with truckers who come to have tea at my shop and distribute pamphlets on HIV and condoms. I also refer people to the Apollo Tyres clinic for in-depth discussions and treatment of sexually transmitted infections”, she says.

Empowering women living with HIV in Ethiopia

Abebech Chanie, 29 years old, tested HIV positive in 2003, as did some 35 000 other Ethiopian women in urban areas that year. The early death of her husband had just deprived her of any income. Her step family had stripped her of all her belongings, and she was left with a sick infant to support. Surviving in Addis Abba, the capital of Ethiopia, just seemed impossible.

She contacted Mekdim Ethiopia National Association, an association for people living with HIV, to seek help. “I found love, comfort, care and support, thanks to the members and staff of Mekdim” says Abebech. The support she was receiving from Mekdim was however only enough for subsistence.

An ILO Programme funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency assisted Mekdim in providing Abebech with more than immediate comfort. She benefited from an entrepreneurship training as part of the ILO *Start and Improve your Business* initiative.

Following the course, with 26 of her friends and starting grant of US\$ 4,500, she was able to secure a plot of land, build a shed and buy 300 chickens to start a poultry farm. Selling their eggs in hotels, they now make a decent living and can send their children to school.

Abebech says that they are now managing the business effectively using the skills they

developed through their training. They are selling the eggs to one of the well-known hotels in Addis Ababa on a daily basis. Their lives have changed and their children are going to school. "I cannot compare my own condition then and now" Abebech recalls, "I used to strive hard to buy a loaf of bread for my son, now the situation is different. I have hope for a bright future."

China's vocational schools playing a key role reaching prospective young migrant workers

In China, millions of workers migrate every year from poor rural areas to seek work in manufacturing zones. The Pearl River Delta in the province of Guangdong is the largest manufacturing centre in the country, employing over 60 million rural migrant workers alone. Due to lack of sexual and reproductive health education, young migrant workers, faced increased risk of unexpected pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

To mainstream HIV education and mitigate the impact of the virus, the ILO worked with the Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security with financial support from the U.S. Department of Labor, to integrate HIV prevention into the core curriculum of vocational schools.

An example is the vocational school of Zhaoqing, near the Pearl River Delta. In this school young migrants aged 14 to 19 receive training on HIV prevention in addition to core technical skills.

Many young people at the school are reaping the benefits of greater openness and access to information. According to one female student, "At the beginning of HIV training I felt very nervous and shy. After the teacher's explanation I felt natural and accepted what she said. People with HIV are not dangerous and they don't deserve any discrimination."

Students in a China's vocational training schools attending an HIV/AIDS training session

Using the example of Zhaoqing and other similar schools, the ILO project has set out to reach as many of the 18 million students in the country's 16,000 vocational schools as possible. Programmes have been set up in 1000 vocational schools and over 2000 teachers were trained in delivering participatory training.

According to Richard Howard, ILO HIV/AIDS Specialist for Asia and the Pacific, "It is estimated that through training in the vocational schools, five million students will be reached in China over the next five years."

"It is refreshing and encouraging to see teachers and students interact in a lively and imaginative way about rather private matters", says the UNAIDS Country Coordinator in China. "Programmes like the one supported by ILO can serve as an excellent model to reach tens of millions of young people and their partners in China, right at the age when they are most prone to behaviours that put them at risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections."

Building capacity in Guyana's trade unions

"The ILO programme is an opportunity we have grabbed with both hands," says Dale Beresford, HIV/AIDS Coordinator of the Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC). "The GTUC did not have the financial resources to develop a policy and plan of action or conduct extensive training. However, the ILO initiative provided an opportunity to use the human resources of the unions to reach out to the members to build their capacity to respond to the epidemic. The end result is that the trained members are able to reach other workers including those living with HIV. Without the ILO's intervention, this would have been impossible. This has widened our knowledge and broadened our horizons."

The GTUC, with its membership of 15 unions, is now committed to including clauses on HIV in all its collective agreements. It has developed an HIV policy and plan of action which includes a framework for implementation, and sensitized the leadership of the affiliated unions in Demerara, Berbice and Essequibo counties.

The ILO's support of the GTUC is part of a workplace education programme in Guyana that places special emphasis on capacity building, to enable partners in government, workers' and employers' organizations to develop and implement their own HIV workplace interventions. To date 23 enterprises from

the public services, agriculture, fishery, banking, hospitality, manufacturing, mining, forestry and private security sectors now have active HIV/AIDS workplace programmes.

The Government of Guyana/ILO/United States Department of Labor workplace education programme on HIV/AIDS started in 2003 and has been expanded in 2006 with the support of the United States President Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).