



International
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Careful monitoring keeps Lesotho HIV workplace programme on track

When the Lesotho Electricity Company (LEC) agreed to a three-day workshop run by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to train workers as HIV/AIDS peer educators, the company wanted to be sure that the participants were serious about their new roles. No money was provided for transport and meals, but 34 workers came anyway. At the end of the workshop LEC's human resources manager, Gerald Mofolo, explained, "This was to test those of you who are committed to the fight against HIV and those who are not. You have really proved that you are serious and on behalf of the company, I commit that you will get all the support and assistance you need. This includes reimbursing you for the costs you have incurred."

The ILO has been working since 2004 with a range of enterprises like the LEC through its SHARE project (Strategic HIV/AIDS Responses in Enterprises) funded by the US Department of Labor. SHARE is a worldwide initiative and the Lesotho programme has proved to be one of its most successful, attracting extra funding through PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief).

In 2004, 15 enterprises from the utility, construction, hospitality and textile sectors started HIV workplace education and prevention programmes for the benefit of some 7,000 workers and managers. In 2007 new funding allowed the project to involve the private security association with a membership of 37 companies employing 6,185 workers. This brings the total number of workers targeted in 2008 to 13,185.

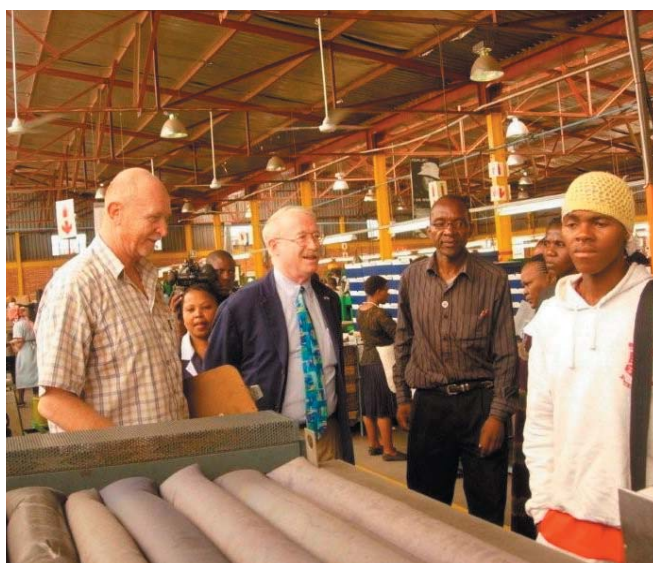
The project faced many challenges in its first two years. First, there was no national policy that promoted HIV/AIDS as a workplace issue as very few enterprises were willing to undertake any such initiatives. The ILO played a vital role in assisting with the formulation of a national HIV/AIDS workplace policy that was adopted officially by parliament in 2006. To support this legislation, the ILO funded translations of the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work in several local languages. Workplace surveys conducted in participating enterprises in 2004 showed that general knowledge

of HIV was high but workers were still engaging in high risk behaviour. Communication and information dissemination, training and education were lacking. Stigma and discrimination were high while very few enterprises had workplace policies. Even those who did have them were not meeting the minimum standards set out in the ILO Code of Practice.

These findings provided the project with information to help enterprises develop relevant HIV/AIDS workplace policies, strategies and programmes. A total number of 105 peer educators have received training since 2004, and they have placed strong emphasis on encouraging their peers to go for VCT in line with the national 'Know your HIV status' campaign. Each enterprise now has an HIV/AIDS coordinator or focal point, who meet quarterly to share experiences with colleagues from other enterprises.

Business and labour join in a unique coalition against HIV

In April 2007 the ILO developed a sustainability plan with its social partners to ensure that HIV/AIDS workplace activities continue beyond the lifespan of



A visit to the ILO partner enterprise, Springfield footwear manufacturers, by Robert Bernard Nolan, US Ambassador to Lesotho

the project. The Lesotho Business and Labour Coalition Against HIV/AIDS in the Workplace was established with the aim of strengthening the contribution of business and labour to Lesotho's national HIV/AIDS programme. Most existing business coalitions do not explicitly include labour organizations so this is an exciting initiative with new possibilities. The coalition has submitted a proposal for funding from the Global Fund with support from the ILO.

Mid-term review calls for more management support at implementation stage

The ILO carried out a mid-term survey involving workers and managers which helped to identify some of the obstacles to programme implementation. Focus group discussions were held in 10 enterprises and a questionnaire was administered to 300 workers and 30 managers.

Of the 300 workers surveyed, 70 per cent reported the lack of proper communication channels with management as a major obstacle to programme implementation. Only 30 per cent of managers reported the same. Nearly three-quarters of respondents saw peer educators as the sole channel of communication between management and workers. Although all the enterprises have trained peer educators, only 50 per cent have specific time allocated for these activities.

Based on these results the enterprises saw the need to make adjustments and these have now been well integrated in most workplaces including the Lesotho Electricity Company. They include the addition of HIV as a regular agenda item at monthly management meetings; the allocation of specific time for HIV activities; a quarterly meeting of peer educators, focal points and representatives of management; and a regular breakfast meeting for managers from different enterprises.

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