



International  
Labour  
Office  
Geneva

## Picking tea and condoms in Malawi

Satemwa Tea Estate is one of the oldest and biggest tea factories in the southern region of Malawi with a workforce of 2,900 men and women. In view of high levels of absenteeism, management was very keen to do something about HIV, but did not know how to make a start. In collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), staff were trained to become peer educators and HIV focal points in each division, an HIV committee was set up and a first draft of an HIV policy developed by workers and managers.

Satemwa has developed a condom strategy called *tolani nokha* (help yourself). Supplies of condoms are left at the reception for staff to take. "Now we don't need to go to the clinic and request a condom, we just pass through the reception and help ourselves and we are not ashamed," explains one of the many workers who are benefiting.

Supervisors pass on messages about HIV during working hours, either while they are monitoring the tea picking or before work, when employees gather for the distribution of tasks for the day. The company has also developed a list of HIV services available locally, in response to requests from workers.



*Passing on HIV messages at work on the Satemwa Tea Estate*

### 'Mobile shade' communication

The peer educators were also keen to find good opportunities to talk to their fellow workers about HIV issues, but wanted to be sure this would not interfere with production. They examined a typical daily schedule to see how they could create a regular slot where colleagues would have time and feel comfortable to talk.

Mobile shade areas are common sites on the tea estate, rigged up wherever the work is going on as a temporary shelter where newly picked tea can be weighed and stored out of the sun's glare before being sent to the factory for processing. The peer educators realised the shades are also used for workers' tea breaks and that they offered a good place to talk about HIV and AIDS. The sessions have proved to be popular and as the shades move around with the work, it is common to hear the question, 'Where is the shade today?' meaning where is the peer education going on.

The shades are also set up to develop tea seedlings out of the direct sun but close to the plots where they will be planted. While the workers are building these temporary shelters, the peer educators take the chance to chat to them about HIV issues.

The mobile shade peer education work has led to a high demand for HIV health services, including condoms. In fact the tea estate clinic recently ran short of supplies for the first time since it had started a condom distribution programme.

### The ILO's programme in Malawi

Out of the group of 10 pilot enterprises in Malawi that have signed a memorandum of cooperation with the ILO, eight have an active joint HIV committee, four have adopted a written HIV/AIDS workplace policy, four have established a condom distribution service, five have made information available on sexually transmitted infections and three on voluntary counselling and testing facilities.



*Peer education taking place while tea shades are constructed*

With the financial support of the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) the ILO project is now reaching 10 workplaces from the agriculture, banking and hospitality sectors. The project also works with the National Association of Business Women. In Malawi alone over 24, 000 workers benefit from workplace interventions with support from the ILO SHARE project (Strategic HIV/AIDS Responses in Enterprises). Worldwide, the SHARE programme is active in over 650 workplaces in 24 countries covering almost one million workers.

Malawi has developed a draft National Policy on HIV/AIDS in the Workplace in consultation with the employers' and workers' organizations. The next step will be to advocate for increasing the number enterprises adopting similar policies at the enterprise level.

To build national capacity in the development of workplace policies and programmes a total of 58 officials from the Ministry of Labour, 19 employers and 160 representatives of trade unions were trained.

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