

AIDS in the workplace



Issue Context:

"Above all, the challenge of AIDS is a challenge of leadership. Leadership has formed the basis of whatever progress we have achieved so far... (including) men and women in the private sector who have recognized that the struggle against AIDS makes good business sense, and have taken steps to protect their employees." (Kofi Annan, Secretary General, United Nations)

"The need for committed action in the private sector remains immense." (UNAIDS)

"HIV/AIDS is a major threat to the world of work... affecting human rights, particularly with respect to discrimination and stigmatisation aimed at workers and people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS." Juan Somavia, Secretary General, International Labour Office.

Creating effective responses to HIV/AIDS has proven to be extremely challenging. As one of the fundamental social structures in our societies, the workplace is at the front line of defence and response to AIDS. Key responsibilities include opening channels of communication, reducing stigma and harnessing the strength and support of social groups to cope with the problem. The challenge is to ensure that all workers, including people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), can determine their own lives.

The ILO's 2001 code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work (the "Voluntary Code" - http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/trav/aids/download/pdf/hiv_a4_e.pdf) was created with the involvement of employers, employees and governments, and is designed for use by all employers and workers, in public, private and informal working sectors. It identifies rights and responsibilities and offers training and information structures, adaptable to the specific conditions within each organisation.

We offer the opportunity to use the World Summit on Sustainable Development ("WSSD") in Johannesburg as a focal point for relevant stakeholders to get together and establish a way forward in this critical area.

Process Context.

Stakeholder Forum for Our Common Future is an international, multi-stakeholder organisation – a network and forum committed to the promotion of global sustainable development. For the last two years, Stakeholder Forum has been working towards the WSSD. The main event around the WSSD that it is organising is the Implementation Conference ("IC").

Stakeholders are invited to engage in the IC towards launching collaborative action that will contribute to implementation of the Sustainable Development Agreements. The need to address AIDS is stressed in, among others, Agenda 21, in the Millennium Declaration and is reiterated in current draft text "Plan of Implementation" that will form the outcome document of the WSSD.

Our Proposal

We propose to engage relevant stakeholders from southern Africa to share their experiences of integrating HIV/AIDS responses into the workplace and to work together to establish effective structures, policies and care/support frameworks. Through sharing and listening to the multiple viewpoints available, it is hoped that businesses and their employees can identify their rights as well as their responsibilities, and create safer and better living and working environments.

We are hosting a three day, professionally facilitated workshop in Johannesburg (August 24-26), at which participants from various stakeholder groups will work together to identify workplace-centred responses to HIV/AIDS. The group will create its own, shared understanding of the problem and focus on action; practical, measurable, achievable targets and processes will be discussed and agreed. The outcome (creation of network, partnerships, etc) will be determined entirely by the participants - Stakeholder Forum has no vested interest, we are merely providing the facilitated space for agreements to develop.

The purpose of the workshop is to:

- Share perspectives and experiences and develop common understanding of the issue;
- Understand the ILO's Voluntary Code and how can be applied, in both formal and informal workplaces;
- Agree appropriate responses, with measurable steps; and
- Agree a network to serve as on-going resource.

Expected participants

To include: International Labour Office, UNAIDS, Southern African governments, ICFTU (International Council of Free Trade Unions); Businesses (particularly energy, mining), Massive Effort Advocacy Campaign, NGO and grassroots group representatives in Southern Africa.