



International
Labour
Office
Geneva

Getting the facts on HIV in Zambia's markets

A restaurant worker in one of Zambia's big rural markets recently decided to speak out about his HIV status. It was a courageous move, but his boss banned him from his cooking job and said he could only clean up after customers. Other stall holders at the market stopped eating at the restaurant when they heard the news, and as business was going down the worker lost his job.

Stigma and discrimination against HIV is widespread in Zambia's informal markets and just one of many reasons why the epidemic is having a major impact on this sector, according to a study launched earlier this year.

"There was growing concern that the formal sector has always been targeted for HIV workplace interventions, while informal workplaces were almost neglected and received very limited information," explains Olive Munjanja, HIV/AIDS Focal Point for the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Zambia. "Only 20 per cent of the workforce is in the formal sector in Zambia, so we set up this study to try and understand and address the needs of the informal workforce, specifically in the markets."

The ILO commissioned the research with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and concentrated its efforts on three large markets involving 3,450 operators. Interviews were held with male and female stall-holders, city council staff covering the markets of COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), Chachacha and Matanda; market leaders and associations; the National AIDS Commission and some NGOs.

The research results highlighted a range of issues that affect this vulnerable sector of the workforce. Lack of information and education about HIV is a key issue - there are many misunderstandings about HIV giving rise to stigma as well as risky behaviour. Many stall holders have to take time off to attend to relatives who are sick with HIV or to look after their own health

- they make no money during this time. They often have little or no working capital and lack business skills, both factors that may lead to casual sex in return for cash or favours.

The survey compiled a list of advocacy issues, including the lack of HIV services in the market places, that will be raised with key policy-making bodies. It also identified issues to raise with the councils about bye-laws that are not being enforced. Some of these relate to activities which contribute to the risk of HIV, for example the use of alcohol and commercial or transactional sex from market booths.

York Farm: committed to fighting HIV/AIDS

With a national HIV prevalence of 14.3 per cent among the most of productive age group of the country (15 to 49 years old), York Farm realised that if it didn't take action HIV/AIDS could have a major impact on the enterprise.

York Farm grows vegetables, mainly for export, and at peak times has up to 3,000 workers. The ILO helped put in place a workplace programme with funding from the Italian government. In the course of a year, a total of 104 peer educators were selected carefully to cover the various sections of the farm and were



Members of the York Farm HIV/AIDS Committee holding their workplace policy

given training. A team of 10 trainers was also trained to ensure that more peer educators could be trained as needed.

After a year and half, in August 2007, a rapid assessment was conducted to identify the areas where the programme needed further support. Among the priorities identified was the development of a workplace policy. In October 2007, an HIV/AIDS committee was formed to work with a policy consultant and to hold consultations with the managers and workers.

On 1st April 2008, York Farm launched its HIV/AIDS workplace policy in the presence of the Minister of Labour and Social Security. The enterprise has ensured that the policy was available in every section of the farm and that every worker is familiar with the contents.

Zambia has a national policy to provide ARVs to all those who need them, free of charge. The ILO has helped York Farm build links with the government clinics and put in place a referral system. The enterprise nurses spearhead awareness-raising and advocacy to

encourage workers to go for voluntary testing, and the ILO has trained counsellors on the two farm sites. The Zambia Health, Education and Communication Trust, an NGO which runs mobile counselling and testing services, has also been brought in as a partner and periodically goes there to offer services.

The workplace policy underpins efforts to extend access to voluntary testing and treatment. As one of the workers said, "It is a great relief to know that with a workplace policy here, you cannot be fired from employment just because you are HIV-positive; now we feel encouraged to go for VCT."

**For further information please contact the
ILO Lusaka HIV/AIDS Focal Point:**

Ms. Olive K. MUNJANJA
munjanja@ilo.org
Telephone: +260 1 257839

