

**III HEMISPHERIC WORKSHOP ON OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**“Searching for improvements in the Occupational Health and Safety conditions of our
workers”**

Activity of the Inter-American Network for Labour Administration (RIAL)

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Experiences Regarding National Action and Promotion Programmes on HIV/AIDS Prevention and
Protection of Labour Rights in the Workplace
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INTRODUCTION

In 2001, seventeen years after the first reported case of HIV in Barbados, the government developed a formal five year action plan, covering the period 2001 to 2006, specific to the management, prevention and control of HIV and AIDS. A subsequent strategic plan for the period from 2008 to 2013 has been developed.

The Government of Barbados, in 2001, took the initiative to consider HIV/AIDS as more than a general health problem, but considered it to be a national issue. This was intended to avoid the potential of the pandemic to undermine the socio-economic and social fabric of the society. The formation of a National Commission on HIV/AIDS to oversee the performance of the programme was one of the strategies employed. Additionally, six key Ministries were given responsibility to address the pandemic at a level that would seek to reduce the incidence of HIV. These were the Ministries of Health; Labour, Sports and Public Sector Reform; Tourism; Education, Youth Affairs and Culture; Home Affairs; and Social Transformation.

Statistics show that the majority of infected persons are in the 25 to 49 age group. As a result of this the role of the Ministry of Labour was evident since this age group vastly constitutes the working population. It is also representative of persons in their economically productive years.

ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR

The responsibility of the then Ministry of Labour, Sports and Public Sector Reform included matters pertaining to trade unions especially workplace issues; educating workers and sportsmen, and encouraging them to be involved in HIV/AIDS advocacy; and ensuring that HIV/AIDS education was part of the in-service training programmes in the Public Service.

The Ministry of Labour had two principal objectives. These were to:

1. Promote a supportive ethical and human rights environment for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in the workplace; and to
2. Reduce the vulnerability of the formal and informal sectors of the workforce through large-scale sensitisation of constituents.

HIV/AIDS Core Group

In order to provide a collaborative approach to attaining these objectives, the Ministry of Labour established an HIV/AIDS Core Group. The role of the core group includes the coordination and management of HIV/AIDS programmes under the portfolio of the Ministry of Labour; provision of a link to the National HIV/AIDS Commission; establishment of fora in which Government and its Social Partners can embark on

a collaborative inter-sectoral approach to reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Workplace; and the promotion of a supportive ethical, legal and human rights environment through the dissemination of workplace related materials to all ministries, departments and organisations.

The core group is tripartite in nature and comprises stakeholders from the public and private sector. Representatives include agencies of the Ministry of Labour; employer and workers organizations; non-governmental organisations and other key interest groups. Governmental departments sitting on the committee include the Government Information Service, the Ministry of Civil Service, the National Insurance Department, and the National HIV/AIDS Commission. The non-governmental organizations and other key interest groups include the Small Business Association, the AIDS Society of Barbados, CARE (Comfort, Assist, Reach-out, Educate), Family Care, and the community based Pinelands Creative Workshop.

ACTIVITIES OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR

With the support and commitment of the organizations represented in the HIV/AIDS Core Group, the Ministry of Labour has undertaken and continues to undertake a number of activities related to education, sensitisation and preventive strategies for HIV. A variety of mass media approaches were applied as a means of impacting on a wider cross-section of the intended target audience.

In the electronic media, activities included:

- a) Televised panel discussions focusing on the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the workplace.

- b) A three-part televised mini-series on HIV/AIDS in the workplace was held in collaboration with the National HIV/AIDS Commission.

- c) Advertisements aired on television and radio to sensitise the audience to information about HIV and AIDS in the workplace, since 2006.

- d) The installation of electronic message boards which display messages about HIV and AIDS at one of the offices of the Labour Department, the National Insurance Department, and a local private pharmacy.

Outreach group activities included:

- e) Town hall meetings focused on “The Impact of HIV/AIDS on the Labour Market, Now and in the Future” were held in 2001.

- f) HIV/AIDS Focus Days held in public transport stations in 2003 and 2006, and at an Industrial Estate in 2007.

Print materials were also used in the dissemination of information. In addition to the production of posters and desk calendars that are distributed in workplaces, formal publications were prepared. To this end, a booklet compiled by the Barbados Employers' Confederation (BEC) and The Barbados Chamber of Commerce and Industry entitled "HIV/AIDS Discrimination in the Workplace is Wrong" was launched in 2004 in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour. HIV/AIDS messages are also included in the Ministry's quarterly reports and newsletters.

Other printed materials that are constantly in use are the Social Partners of Barbados - *Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and Other Life Threatening Illnesses in the Workplace*; the ILO *Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work*; and the BEC handbooks *Dealing with AIDS in the Workplace* and *HIV and AIDS Stigma and Discrimination in the Workplace*.

A novel approach to raising awareness was the erection of a billboard in one of the island's fishing towns.

This was a joint project between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Agriculture.

SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS

Seminars and Workshops have also been a critical component in the attainment of the Ministry's goals, particularly the second objective which is to reduce vulnerability through large scale sensitisation. On occasion, the Ministry of Labour collaborates with local and international agencies to effect sensitization.

In May 2002, the Ministry hosted the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Tripartite Sub-Regional Meeting on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work. Tripartite delegations from thirteen ILO member countries were represented. The ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work was examined in detail. The meeting culminated with a *Platform for Action on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work in the Caribbean* which identified strategies for action at the regional, national and enterprise level. It required governments, employers' and employees' organizations to take the following actions:

- Raise national awareness, involving appropriate and concerned groups to eliminate stigma and discrimination attached to HIV, to fight the culture of denial and thereby prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS,
- Strengthen the capacity of the social partners to address the pandemic,
- Strengthen occupational safety and health systems to protect groups at risk,
- Formulate and implement social and labour policies and programmes that mitigate the effects of AIDS, and
- Effectively mobilize resources.

Two years later, in October 2004, the Ministry supported the ILO and United States Department of Labour (USDOL) when they launched the ILO/USDOL HIV/AIDS Workplace Education Programme. This initiative was specifically tailored to private sector companies. It provided guidance and training in HIV Workplace policy implementation, peer education and behavioural change communication. The completion of the programme saw the successful implementation of an HIV programme at Purity Bakeries and the establishment of similar programmes in other companies.

In October 2003, a workshop on the Social Partners of Barbados Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and Other Life Threatening Illnesses in the Work Place was held to encourage employers in all sectors to adopt or create a policy on HIV/AIDS in the workplace. This code of practice gives guidance on expected hiring practices where information relative to the HIV status of an applicant or employee is concerned. The code requires that an individual should not be required to give his HIV status to an employer or prospective employer. It also addresses the continued employment of infected persons for as long as is possible, with consideration to facilitate work modifications. It encourages employers to play an active role in the education and sensitizing of employees and makes reference to supportive programmes if it becomes necessary. It requires that co-workers concerns shall be addressed. The code of practice is very specific about discrimination against infected persons so that their entitlements in the workplace are protected; and about the confidentiality of any information voluntarily disclosed by an employee. Employees also have responsibilities in the Social Partners Code of Practice. This Code of Practice was first printed and distributed in July 2002.

A three-day Peer Educators Workshop was held in 2007 for agencies in the public sector. Participants were invited on the basis of interest in becoming peer educators, rather than by nomination.

DELIVERY OF TRAINING MODULES

The formal inclusion of HIV/AIDS sensitization in orientation sessions is held for all persons embarking on overseas migrant workers programmes; as well as during some seminars and workshops held by the Labour Department, the BEC and members of the Congress of Trade Unions and staff Associations (CTUSAB). HIV/AIDS modules were developed for students in the apprenticeship programmes of the Barbados Vocational Training Board and organizations which receive funding for worker training and development from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council.

Within the Public Service specifically, the Training Administration Division includes an HIV module in the majority of the training programmes and courses offered by that agency. As a result, training and education on HIV/AIDS is ongoing in the public service.

COLLABORATION WITH EMPLOYERS REPRESENTATIVES

The Ministry collaborated with the Barbados Employers' Confederation (BEC) on some specific initiatives, listed below. The BEC is an organization that represents the interests of private sector employers.

In February 2004, a seminar for private sector managers entitled "HIV/AIDS in the Workplace: Best Practices in Business" was held in collaboration with the Barbados Employers' Confederation. It was used to expose employers to the latest developments in management of HIV/AIDS in the workplace. Specific objectives of the seminar were to:

- review successful international company policies on HIV/AIDS,
- educate employers regarding legal and ethical industrial relations practices when managing HIV/AIDS in the workplace, and
- encourage best practices in the establishments and the development and implementation of company policies on HIV/AIDS.

In October 2005, the ministry collaborated with the Barbados Employers' Confederation on the first of two workshops for businesses, to assist in the drafting and implementation of an HIV/AIDS workplace policy.

In 2006 and 2007, the ministry collaborated with the Barbados Employers Confederation to host a workshop for senior students of secondary level entitled "Securing the Workforce of the Future". This annual workshop seeks to coach potential job seekers on expected behaviours in the workplace and specifically addresses the avoidance of stigma and discrimination in relation to HIV.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Some activities have been found to be successful. It is anticipated that these initiatives would dispel any myths about HIV and AIDS and keep the facts always prominent. This would ultimately ensure the promotion of a supportive ethical and human rights environment for people infected and affected by HIV in the workplace, which is a primary objective of the Ministry of Labour. Some activities anticipated to become annual events are listed:

- a) Education and sensitization of workers at HIV/AIDS Focus Days and Health Fairs.
- b) Publication and distribution of the desk calendar with messages about HIV and AIDS, and publications of the codes of practice.
- c) The inclusion of an HIV/AIDS messages in the Ministry's quarterly reports and newsletters

New events planned for the financial year (April 2008 - March 2009) include:

- a) hosting of an inaugural debating competition among Ministries in the public sector; and
- b) conducting a survey to assess the status of workplace policies and programmes in large to medium sized organizations in the private sector.

OTHER SECTORAL INITIATIVES

Other sectors conduct programmes which are not specifically driven by the Ministry of Labour, however, these will impact on HIV in the workplace. Some of the programmes of the Ministries of Health and Tourism which are specific to vulnerable working groups are outlined.

In addition to erecting billboards seasonally, targeting both visitors and locals at the ports of entry; the Ministry of Tourism has provided peer educator training for workers in the tourist industry. There are also plans to introduce a behavioural change communication module in that sector.

A special effort to target the informal workers in the tourism sector was also initiated. A current project being done jointly between the Ministries of Tourism and Health targeting sex workers is ongoing. The mode of operation involves visiting specific districts during peak periods and interacting with the persons that work during these times. A component of the project includes a survey of that specific sector to determine the level of awareness, the measures taken for protection and the level of consistency among other parameters.

CHALLENGES

Many of the methods used to reach the working population have been successful, especially as it pertains to the formal sectors. Access to the informal sector has been a challenge especially as it relates to face-to-face activities. Examples of these sectors include but are not limited to the self employed and micro-enterprise operations; the fisher-folk; vendors and water-sport operators. Another major challenges of the Ministry of Labour, is insufficient data on behavioural change patterns based on specific initiatives due to the absence of baseline studies. While some studies and surveys have been initiated, others are being commissioned in order to assess the success of current programmes and to develop and reinforce successful programmes in order to enhance the management, prevention and control of HIV and AIDS.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Ministry of Labour to enhance the management, prevention and control of HIV, especially in the workforce has been taken very seriously. In the seven years since the Ministry of Labour started to address HIV/AIDS in the world of work, there has been a consistent and persistent effort to find mechanisms to appeal to the various sectors in the economy. Initiatives were taken to include all stakeholders by the establishment of an HIV/AIDS Core Group using the tripartite structure.

The objectives of the Ministry to promote a supportive ethical and human rights environment; and to reduce vulnerability in the formal and informal sectors have been executed by the use of mass media and group activities. Inter-sectoral approaches and collaboration with regional and international agencies have been found to be beneficial and will be continued.

The need to penetrate the informal sectors and to formally determine successes have been identified. Efforts to ensure the prevention and elimination of stigma and discrimination must also be intensified if we are to successfully mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on the social, labour and economic development of the country. This remains critical where the majority of the HIV positive persons are found in the working population.
