

# REACHING SPOUSES THROUGH WORKPLACE PROGRAMMES

*Workplace programmes are an effective way to address HIV and AIDS. Many programmes also intend to reach out to the community and families of the employees. One example of a low-cost intervention is how companies have trained spousal peer educators through the Swedish Workplace HIV and AIDS Programme (SWHAP). The effect has been not only a more effective internal workplace programme as the spouses of the employees are also involved, but also a low-cost intervention in reaching out to the community.*

Several factors have been identified as the major drivers of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Gender disparity has been singled out as one of the chief social factors that influence the spread of the epidemic. HIV and AIDS is not only driven by gender inequality, it entrenches gender inequality, putting women, men and children at further risk. The previously upheld conceptions that singled out people at risk of HIV and AIDS as homosexuals, commercial sex workers and drug users have obscured the increasing infection rate among those who were believed to be safe, including married people, especially women. For example in many third world countries where most women are economically dependent on men, their ability to make decisions about sex may be most constrained.

Whilst SWHAP's mandate is to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS; and implement long term strategies to contribute to the establishment of HIV and AIDS policies and programmes at Swedish-linked workplaces in Sub-Saharan Africa (which are predominantly male) the SWHAP programme acknowledged the need to make this intervention complete by extending the programmes to the spouses/sexual partners of employees of the Swedish-related companies. In order to address this, a popular but relatively costly intervention has been to organise family days on HIV and AIDS.

Another increasingly popular intervention that can be done at a lower cost has been to train spouses as community peer educators. The spousal peer educator interventions were initiated by Sandvik in Zambia in 2008 and have since been replicated in Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. In total, 200 spouses have been trained as peer educators.

## KEY RESULTS

The result was that the information gap between spouses/partners regarding HIV transmission, progression, prevention and management was significantly reduced. Partners become open to tested and couple counselling and testing increased. At the same time, as it had a positive effect on the internal workplace programme, the spouses trained started to work as community peer educators by spreading HIV information at community level.

The interventions can be done at a low cost. Small companies that would not train a large number of peer educators, have been able to include spouses in their regular peer educator trainings at minimal costs.

## OBJECTIVES OF TRAINING SPOUSES AS PEER EDUCATORS

The main objective of the partner/spousal training was to create awareness and the same understanding of HIV and AIDS between spouses/partners thereby creating an enabling environment for discussing pertinent issues such as safer sex, partner counselling and testing and voluntary disclosure of HIV status. Spousal training also aimed to equip the spouses/partners of Swedish linked companies' employees as the drivers of behaviour change in their respective marriages/partners and communities. Spousal/partner training had important ripple effects which include the following programmes spearheaded by the trained spouses/partners.





## EXAMPLE OF SPOUSAL ACTIVITIES AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

- ⓧ Community outreach programmes which include support to two HIV after schools clubs in two high-density suburbs in Harare.
- ⓧ A group of psycho-social counsellors led by trained peer spouses providing free HIV counselling services at a local district clinic in Kitwe, Zambia.
- ⓧ Income-generating projects for trained peer spouses which provide a platform for dialogue around HIV issues as well as provide income for the women (also an empowerment tool).
- ⓧ Awareness raising and behaviour change promotion at community level through support to a local football boozers club.
- ⓧ Family wellness days that include promotion and provision of HIV testing and counselling, Zambia & Zimbabwe.
- ⓧ Outreach to churches in Zambia & Zimbabwe.
- ⓧ Trained spousal peer educators have disclosed their HIV status to communities and are now advocates for testing, behaviour change and treatment adherence in Zimbabwe.

## RESULTS OF INTERVENTION

- ⓧ The information gap between spouses regarding HIV has been reduced
- ⓧ Replication of intervention to other SWHAP partners in the region
- ⓧ Spousal – led community outreach programmes provide opportunity to further spread SWHAP experiences as well as spread knowledge and information about HIV and AIDS to audiences that would not have been ordinarily accessible through workplace programmes
- ⓧ Couple testing increased



*The Swedish Workplace HIV/AIDS Programme (SWHAP) is a joint initiative by the International Council of Swedish Industry (NIR) and the Swedish Industrial and Metalworkers' Union (IF Metall). It is a long-term strategy to contribute to the establishment and/or support of HIV and AIDS programmes at Swedish related workplaces in Sub-Saharan Africa. SWHAP is cofunded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.*

[www.swhap.org](http://www.swhap.org)



*The International Council of Swedish Industry (NIR) is an associate to the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, Sweden's major business organisation representing nearly 60,000 member companies, commissioned to promote and protect Swedish business' long term interests in markets characterised by economic, political or social complexities.*

[www.nir.se](http://www.nir.se)



*The Swedish Industrial and Metalworkers' Union (IF Metall) organises more than 380,000 members at nearly 12,400 workplaces, affiliated to 52 local branches. IF Metall is aiming to safeguard the members' interest and strength in order to create the best possible conditions in working life as well as in society at large. This includes an extensive cooperation with trade unions internationally.*

[www.ifmetall.se](http://www.ifmetall.se)