



Sustaining Programmes in Economic Crisis – Outcome from discussion at South African network meeting

The South African Network Meeting of the Swedish Workplace HIV and AIDS Programme was held on 15-16 May 2009 in Johannesburg. One of the main themes that the 28 participants from 11 workplaces discussed was the implications of the economic crisis and how workplace programmes on HIV and AIDS or wellness could cope with the financial stress they are currently experiencing.

The meeting discussed how the economic crisis can ripple into a social crisis that in turn is worsened by the HIV pandemic. Obviously, this creates considerable problems for the workplaces which are experiencing retrenchments, tighter budgets and uncertainty about the future of their jobs. The issue of sustaining the HIV programmes become even more acute as the economic crisis is coinciding with the withdrawal of SWHAP co-funding. Even in the cases where there is a budget at the moment, there is a risk of sudden budget cuts following loss in earnings for the companies. Moreover, in the cases where the budgets are still available there has often been a lack of time to devote to the programmes. The reason is that the retrenchments have led to that the staff remaining have more working tasks and, thus, less time for VCT, trainings etc. The retrenchments have also led to the need in several programmes to reinvent the wheel as some committee members and peer educators might be laid off. Needless to say, this situation does not only create a stress on the workplace programme but increased pressure on the employees, committee members and peer educators.

Finally, the situation risks causing an increased risk of HIV due to for example more

- Alcohol abuse (as well as related spousal abuse)
- Drug abuse
- High risk sexual behavior
- Financial problems
- Stress
- Depression

In view of the increased risk, there is a strong need to continue with the programmes. To do this, one needs to reflect the real costs of HIV to the company; show improvement on bottom line; as well as prove the return on investment. Moreover, one needs to be creative in the approaches used as well as consolidate and integrate resources, different programmes, reporting etc. A sustainable programme needs to be adaptable as conditions will always change. Thus, no matter the economic crisis or not, there is a need to assess the different ways in which different interventions can be implemented, as well as the priority that should be given to varying interventions. In order to achieve this, the SWHAP network meeting came forward with the following suggestions:

Plan and focus:

- Proactively evaluate programme
 - Assess the plan and budget
 - Focus on your company's specific needs
 - Implement it structurally
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- Communicate to management and staff: It is of key importance to be able to show the management results of the interventions and to encourage employee ownership of the programmes:
 - For example, programmes should wish to reduce absenteeism and save money that they lose due to HIV and AIDS. If the decrease in absenteeism is proven it constitutes a strong argument for management to continue investing in the workplace programme.
 - Use statistics from actuarial assessment which show substantial savings of a comprehensive programme.
 - Make sure that the economic benefit also reaches employees. For example, if funds are saved from the medical scheme due to a successful workplace programme, make sure that this saving is used to for example increase retirement benefits of employees.
- Prevention **is** most cost effective
 - Implement induction training for new employees on the programmes
 - Use the internal capacity of peer educators and counselors more often instead of always contracting service providers
 - Try to not contract too many service providers but instead negotiate with the one provider to do what you need as external resources

Increased focus on monitoring and evaluation:

Think even more about the input, process, output, outcome, and impact of each intervention and always ask yourself:

- Is this activity contributing to your aim of keeping the employee negative?
 - Is this the best and most cost effective manner in achieving your aims?
 - Is this activity applicable and relevant to your company and employees or is it done for window dressing and good image?
 - Look at the budget and argue the necessity and importance of all the expenditures. Is the t-shirt and food really necessary?
- A good tool in monitoring and evaluation could be the reporting tools that the SWHAP has developed and the coordinators' and peer educators' monthly reports.
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Reduce input needed:

Save time by:

- Having shorter sessions
- If the company works with shifts, one could have short info-sessions (i.e. 15 min) when the shifts are changing
- Should look at calendar and identify particular days during which the committees can promote and for awareness raising. Every occasion should be used to link up to HIV and AIDS such as
 - Hand out flower and Femi Dom on Women's day
 - Attach messages to payslips
- Use innovative approaches such as a vegetable garden at the site and educate on how to grow them (can even be done in a tyre or box on site so that people see how easy it is when passing by).

Save costs by use of existing resources such as:

- On site clinic. Those who cannot get treatment from their companies should partner with governments and institutions. Networking might be needed with Department of Health and others to source out programmes on treatment.
 - Community support and referrals to NGO facilities:
 - Pro bono legal clinic (011 336 9510), HIV 911
 - Literature / posters (DOH)
 - External VCT
 - Support groups (could also be instituted at company level to support employees)
 - AIDS Health Foundation HIV awareness videos on YouTube
 - Companies can seek various forms of other support such as being members of SABCOHA.
 - Share activities with other companies to share the cost.
 - Make use of peer educators' training by including spouses if there is place left. Spousal peer educators are also good actors to work on community outreach with (for example) schools and sports clubs.
 - Internalise programmes in terms of education by using internal trainers instead of service providers.
 - Get more advance training for peer educators so that they can take care of counselling etc.
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- Sometimes large budgets were allowed to service providers to do a large variety of activities. Could have been more focused and cost effective.
 - Newsletters are a cheap way of reaching out to families.
 - Can reduce costs for family days by instead organising pep-rallies around the neighbourhood and/or having employees pay part of the t-shirt costs.
 - Integration of HIV and AIDS with occupational health and safety as there legally must be a fund for OHS.
 - Make use of BBB-EE investments to finance workplace programmes and community outreach.
 - Try to use the CSI budget to reach spouses and families and not only communities.
 - Can create social clubs at the workplaces where you meet once a month and discuss common issues.
 - *More ideas can be found in the SWHAP 2008 Regional Conference Report available at www.swhap.org.*
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