

Launch STOP AIDS NOW! Country Project Ethiopia - on HIV and AIDS in the Workplace

The Ethiopian HIV and AIDS workplace project for 35 NGOs partnering with Cordaid and Oxfam Novib was officially launched on 28th March 2008, at the Global hotel, in Addis Ababa. The objectives of conducting this event are: (i) introducing the action plan of the project to partner organisations and other key stakeholders; (ii) sharing experiences of HIV and AIDS workplace policy implementation by NGOs and business sector; (iii) familiarizing the general public about the importance of development and implementation of HIV and AIDS workplace policy; and (iv) establishing learning community among partners and stakeholders.

The launching ceremony was conducted for half a day starting from 2:30pm and was officially opened by Mr Dereje Alemayehu, representative of Association of Ethiopians Living with HIV and AIDS-one of the steering group NGOs of SAN! Ethiopia Project. In total 40 people attended the event of the total number 12 were female participants.

During the event, three presentations were made:

(i) The Coordinator of SAN! Ethiopia Project provided a presentation on the project initiation, goal, contents and approach. As he explained, the project facilitates group as well as individual organisational learning processes among 35 NGOs with an objective of enabling organisations to successfully develop and implement HIV and AIDS workplace policy.

(ii) The second presentation focused on the experience of Shell Ethiopia (private company) in implementing HIV and AIDS workplace policy. Key messages from this presentation are: the possibility to curb the impact and spread of HIV and AIDS, a step by step mover to effectively address HIV and AIDS in the workplace, catching up the epidemic at its early stage is very important, peer awareness/education is key in workplace, leadership plays vital role for the success of HIV and AIDS interventions in workplace etc.

(iii) The third presentation was made by Agri Service Ethiopia (ASE)-an NGO that participated in the pilot phase of the project (2004-2005). The experience of ASE has been important to understand the status of organisations participated in the pilot project, which is a base for the current phase, and identify the major problems implementing organisations are encountered with. As the presenter pointed out, the following challenges have been considered as constraining factors for implementation of workplace policy in their particular organisation: inadequate staff motivation to attend dialogues sessions, still lack of clarity about HIV and AIDS internal mainstreaming, how to manage confidentiality and taking disciplinary measures need further understanding and consultation.

The participants as well as presenters shared their experiences and concerns related with development and implementation of HIV and AIDS workplace policy. From the discussion the following key arguments have been picked up:

- Establishment of HIV and AIDS fund within organisation and working with community structures (Idir) could be part of the overall framework of HIV and AIDS interventions in workplace.
- Creating a functional system within organisation has an added value to implement workplace policy. Installing this system obviously considers the size and dynamics of organisation. In general, a functional system encompasses: (i) creating single point accountability i.e. the general manager (director) of the organisation; (ii) establishment of HIV and AIDS supper body with a membership of general manager, human resources manager, external affairs manager, health Advisor and other senior staff; (iii) establishment of HIV and AIDS task force; (iv) selection of a focal point to specifically focus on workplace policy; (v) incorporation of workplace interventions in strategic and annual plans of the organisation; (vi) establishment of monitoring mechanisms to oversee the progress of activities, for example : monthly task force meeting, periodic reporting to the supper body, organizing staff dialogue sessions.
- Having a special arrangement with hospitals and pharmacy will assist to keep confidentiality among people with AIDS and other staff member.
- Both positive and negative experiences of using condoms by staff have been mentioned. "Some staff collect condoms from the office and provide to their kids to play with whilst some others expected to use for protecting themselves from HIV virus." It has been raised that usually on Friday the number of condoms in washing rooms would decrease.

The launching ceremony was communicated to the general public through mass media including Monitor Newspaper and Ethiopian Radio.