

Workshops report

PAID-WA's Institutional HIV & AIDS Policy

Recognizing HIV and AIDS as a critical labor and development issue

July 15th to 17th, 2009 in the Pan African Institute for Development –West Africa (PAID-WA), Buea, Cameroon

These workshops held from the 15th to 17th July 2009 in PAID-WA, Buea (Cameroon) gathered in total, 82 participants: students of PAID-WA, PAID-WA alumni, students from other institutions within Buea, staff of PAID-WA, students and staff of Institut Pan Africain pour le Développement – Afrique Central (IPD-AC), Douala, representatives of faith based organizations and other institutions within Buea, Consulates and government ministries.

These workshops aimed at providing a forum for PAID-WA's stakeholders to share and strengthen knowledge and awareness of HIV and AIDS and its impact in the workplace/institutions, to learn about applicable HIV and AIDS workplace policies in the process of reviewing and revising the draft of PAID-WA's Institutional Policy on HIV/AIDS.

1. Background to the Workshops

The impact of HIV and AIDS on the productivity of institutions and workplaces requires all efforts to address it. The depth of the impact of HIV and AIDS on the world of work as recognized by the ILO is attributed to the fact that at least most workers between 15 to 49 years - the most productive segment of the labor force are infected with HIV¹. In Cameroon, of the 530,000 persons living with HIV and AIDS 500,000 (93% of PLWH) are between 15 and 49 years old² – also constituting the major workforce in the country. Consequently, HIV and AIDS cuts the supply of labor, reduces income for many workers, increases absenteeism, and leads to loss of valuable skills and experiences¹. Educational institutions also play a vital role in teaching employees and students about HIV and AIDS, shaping attitudes to HIV & AIDS and to people living with HIV, and building skills for reducing risk of HIV, promoting care and opposing stigmatization.

With the huge impact of HIV and AIDS on the workforce and workplace/institutions, the workplace & institutions are a good place to fight this disease. Workplaces are communities that provide an opportunity for awareness, education programmes and the protection of rights because a lot of debate and discussions take place when workers come together and learn various things from each other. Employers being leaders, provide appropriate leadership which is crucial for the fight against HIV and AIDS

¹ Implementing the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work: An education and training manual. Geneva, International Labour Office, 2002

² Epidemiological Country profile on HIV/AIDS, 2008. WHO/UNAIDS, 2008

2. The Rationale for the Workshops

The establishment of an HIV/AIDS Policy is still to be embraced by many workplaces and institutions in Cameroon as a potential guide for an effective response to the disease at the workplace/institution. This is mainly due to their lack of understanding of the immense impact of HIV and AIDS, unawareness of such an approach and the lack of capacity and leadership to develop or implement an HIV& AIDS Workplace policy. It is therefore important for employers throughout the country and in the world to learn important lessons on the practical responses to HIV in the workplace and apply them. It is for this reason that PAID-WA as an educational institution as well as a workplace has adopted a policy that lays a framework for necessary actions and appropriate practices that will limit the spread of HIV, stigma and discrimination related to HIV and AIDS and ultimately minimizes its impact in its institution.

3. The Workshops

Taking into consideration that the participants' knowledge and experience with HIV/AIDS and related workplace policies were uneven; the workshops were designed to ensure the transfer of appropriate and relevant HIV and AIDS knowledge, to encourage respect to all perspectives and honest exchange of views and to enable open exploration of the draft policy.

Workshop with PAID-WA's Primary stakeholders - students

The first workshop involved an icebreaker activity, an HIV/AIDS awareness sharing activity, a presentation on basic HIV and AIDS facts and facts on HIV risk and Vulnerability especially among youths/students, breakout and review session.

The activities and the presentation illustrated how people can get misinformed with facts on HIV and AIDS, understanding what HIV and AIDS mean, the importance of understanding the nature of the disease and ways of protecting oneself from it. During the breakout session, the students brainstormed and generated ideas on how as members of an institution they can contribute in making their institutions caring and safe places for those infected and affected with HIV, their roles in preventing the transmission of the disease, combating stigma and discrimination and providing compassion and support to improve situations that limits the capacity of the students affected or living with HIV and AIDS to cope with the tragedy of the pandemic. Such collective ideas serve as guidelines for laying down the right, responsibilities and policies for students as regards HIV and AIDS.

The review session enabled the students understand their individual and collective rights and responsibilities in their efforts to fight HIV and AIDS.

Workshop with PAID-WA staff and staff of other institutions

This workshop was initiated by a presentation from the Director of PAID-WA, defining PAID-WA's position in the fight against HIV and AIDS and the objectives of the Institutional HIV/AIDS Policy. Based on the rationale that experiences shared on policy implementation and best practices provides useful information, examples and lessons of the content, process and challenges in developing an HIV/AIDS Policy, experience sharing was also a fundamental activity during this workshop.

The review session involved mainly group work where participants went into groups to brainstorm and generate collective ideas and views in accordance with HIV/AIDS policies in the course of reviewing PAID-WA's drafted HIV/AIDS Policy. During this exercise, information was gathered from knowledgeable experts and outside organizations that led to gains in knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS Policies relating to

the development of a workplace policy. This session also enabled the participants learn about the impact of HIV/AIDS in the workplace and beyond.

Workshop with PAID-WA and IPD-AC staff

The main purpose of this workshop was to adopt the outcomes of the previous workshops and validate PAID-WA's Institutional HIV/AIDS Policy. The Regional Coordinator of the Regional Technical Group (RTG) for the fight against HIV/AIDS in the South West Region of Cameroon gave a presentation defining the role of RTG (an arm of the National AIDS Control Committee in Cameroon) in the fight against HIV/AIDS and the bases on which health Policies are built. He also gave an essential lecture that outlined and explained the objectives of the Health Insurance scheme – the Buea Mutual health Insurance provide by the Ministry of Health in Cameroon and its benefits to health related policies.

The process of revising the components of the draft policy involved all staff of PAID-WA to ensure their participation in arriving at a consensus on HIV/AIDS policy for PAID-WA based on the drafted Policy and on the suggestions and recommendations made during the previous workshops.

The checklist for the development of an HIV/AIDS Policy as provided by the ILO code of Practice served as a guide to put in place the practices and procedures of the Institutional HIV/AIDS Policy PAID-WA agreed to adopt and implement in minimizing the impact of the HIV and AIDS in the Institution. During the adoption of the Institutional HIV/AIDS Policy, all PAID-WA staff were invited to share their views, comments and support to this strategy. Together with the other statements of the draft Policy, the revised statements were approved by all staff who also indicated their full support to the adoption and subsequent implementation of the Policy.

4. Key outcomes of the workshops

At the end of these workshops, the participants' knowledge on basic facts on HIV and AIDS and HIV risk and vulnerability was strengthened, the participants had expressed personal feelings, opinions, knowledge and anxieties about the disease and had understood their basic rights and obligations, elaborated their perceptions, and arrived at a consensus on their rights and responsibilities with respect to HIV and AIDS.

Overall these learning activities also inspired other institutions and workplaces with little previous knowledge or no experience with workplace HIV/AIDS Policy to develop one.

This activity provided an opportunity for other organizations/institutions represented to appraise and improve on the components of their own HIV/AIDS policies.

Most importantly, these workshops led to the review, revision and the adoption of PAID-WA's draft Institutional HIV/AIDS Policy.

5. Conclusion

HIV is easily transmitted from the wider community to workers and their families. Its transmission is influenced by behaviors and socio-economic pressures present within the communities in which the workforce lives. A key point to be emphasized based on the outputs and outcome of these workshops is that prevention and education are more cost effective for a sustained response to fight the transmission of this pandemic. An institutional policy ensures this cost effective response. A policy can help the

workplace/institution pay less for treatment of infected/affected staff or students. It can also help pay less for medical expenditures and improve the quality of work and life of infected and affected persons.

All workplaces/institutions should care about this epidemic and ensure a supportive work environment for workers living with HIV. The overall workforce will be more receptive to learning and acting against the disease if their employers show concern and support and that starts with establishing a workplace HIV/AIDS Policy.

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ⁱ For more information on this report and the workshops, other HIV & AIDS activities and health and development training programmes carried out by PAID-WA please visit our website: www.paidwestafrica.org . Alternatively contact PAID-WA for more information by email: paidwaorg@yahoo.com.hk or by phone.



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