

Global Health Initiative

Catalyzing partnerships to tackle HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria & Health Systems Strengthening

Case Study: Unilever (Kenya)

2006

- Unilever has extended its HIV/AIDS workplace programme to include small to medium sized companies in Unilever Tea Kenya's supply chain as part of the 'Beyond Big Business' programme tracked by the Global Health Initiative. Ongoing programmes are now established in 75 supplier companies
- Free antiretroviral treatment is available under a public private partnership co-ordinated by Walter Reed and funded by PEPFAR
- Misconceptions about HIV/AIDS are being dispelled by training a team of SME employees as peer educators to educate their co-workers about the disease

Background & Challenge

Kenya is the largest economy in East Africa and currently has an HIV/AIDS infection rate of 7%. It is estimated that 150,000 people die annually from the virus. Despite the high infection rate, many misconceptions are still prevalent, and the social stigma associated with the disease can make it difficult for information to flow freely to those that most need it.

To address this issue, Unilever Tea Kenya has established an HIV/AIDS workplace programme, providing employees with lifesaving information, testing and treatment. These programmes were initially offered to Unilever employees but as part of the GHI's "Beyond Big Business" programme, have now been extended to the employees of their small and medium sized suppliers.

The programmes are built around a peer educator approach as it was found that that employees are more comfortable talking with specially trained co-workers about the disease than they are with management or outsiders.



Supplier's View:

Valentine Farm is a supplier to Unilever Tea Kenya. At the start of the 'Beyond Big Business' programme, only 5% of employees came forward for testing, for fear of losing their job if they tested positive. Top management assured employees they would not lose their job if tested positive and co-workers were educated to support, not discriminate against colleagues. This encouraged more employees to come forward for testing, with 40% having been tested now. Employees have free access to antiretroviral treatment at the local hospital.

The programme has led to a much greater understanding amongst employees about HIV/AIDS. This knowledge is also being shared with the wider community.

"I followed the topics in the Unilever program e.g. women with AIDS, how it affects us, how we can prevent it, where is mainly found e.g. they thought it came from sweat and urine, but now they realise it is from blood and semen. They came to appreciate there is something to be gained by being open about AIDS and how we can reduce it" commented Helen, a security guard and peer educator, Valentine Farm.

"Employees have taken what they have learned in the workplace and shared it within their communities. They are talking about how HIV/AIDS can kill if not treated, using condoms and having single partners to stop the spread of infection."

Eudias Gakibe, Production Manager, Valentine Farm

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SME Project Details

Unilever recently extended this programme to include 75 of its suppliers. The programme includes three core elements:

Educating employees on HIV/AIDS through workplace seminars, videos and specially trained 'peer educators'. This includes asking an employee infected by HIV/AIDS from one farm to talk to employees of another farm.

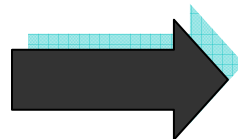


Distributing condoms and information on how to prevent mother-to-child transmission to employees

Providing advice on the availability of treatment, counselling and education on disease management. In addition, peers are educated to be supportive of their colleagues who tested HIV positive.

Impact of Project

All 75 participating suppliers involved in Unilever's pilot programme now have HIV/AIDS policies in place. The key success of this programme has been to dispel the misconceptions that were prevalent amongst employees. This was achieved by training people within the workforce to act as educators to their peers. The programme has also helped to ease the social stigma often associated with the disease.



Next Steps

Unilever Tea Kenya will continue to train peer educators and to facilitate these supply chain programmes. Unilever is currently evaluating how best to expand this programme in order to increase the impact of this work on the communities they work within.