

## Accelerating Response to HIV/AIDS and Stigma in the IT Sector

**Given the need to increasingly engage the private sector in India's HIV/AIDS response, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Indian Business Trust for HIV/AIDS (IBT) and the World Bank Institute (WBI) have joined together in the planning of a program to help local companies organize HIV/AIDS and stigma reduction interventions in their workplace and community.** The first joint activities planned under this program are a videoconference, and a series of follow-up workshops and activities that are intended to help engage more small and medium sized companies, youth and key sectors, especially the Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology enabled Service (ITeS) sectors in the South of India in the private sector's response to HIV/AIDS and stigma.

India has a large proportion of young people contributing significantly to its fast growing economy. IT and ITeS sectors have been major drivers of this growth, effectively engaging over one million young workers, and many more young customers. However, this growth could be severely undermined by the staggering increase of HIV/AIDS in the population, and India's youth and future social and economic leaders could be among those most affected by the epidemic. It is alarming that almost half of all new HIV infections are among 15-24 year olds. In its 2006 report UNAIDS estimated that out of the 40 million people living with HIV worldwide, one third are young people.

The business sector, together with government and civil society, has a clear role and responsibility to prevent the impact of HIV/AIDS, and address stigma about the virus within and outside their companies; it is here that the IT and ITeS sectors, including small and medium sized companies can play a critical leadership role. The IT and ITeS sectors are models of innovation and change in India, and their HIV/AIDS responses should be no different. Addressing HIV/AIDS can help ensure a productive workforce, and assist in developing goodwill and relations with communities.

In addition to young workers being essential for the IT and ITeS sector's' growth, workers in these sectors may be vulnerable to HIV exposure for reasons such as lifestyle risk factors. Further, many companies in these sectors are located in communities impacted by the mainly concentrated HIV/AIDS epidemic. According to UNAIDS (2006), 80% of all reported AIDS cases in the country are in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Manipur and Nagaland. Companies may also encounter HIV/AIDS among their workforce and, often, hidden impacts such as stigma, discrimination, and damaged worker morale.

One way for a company in any sector to respond to HIV/AIDS is through the development of a customized response with different activities to address HIV/AIDS and stigma. Typical program components in companies in India have included HIV/AIDS policy, education, HIV counseling and testing, access to care and support, partnerships with the community and studies on risk in the workplace. However, considering the heterogeneity of India's epidemic, and the innovative nature of the IT and ITeS sectors, there is no single best practice to guide a company's response. IT and ITeS companies have the advantage of learning from successful initiatives, as well as a unique ability to spread education and awareness to young people through diverse initiatives, such as IT-based HIV/AIDS education and video games.

Best regards,

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