



HIV and AIDS & TB Workplace Program: Moving Towards a Sustainable Future

Background

The Connect Project, funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for the period of 2006 – 2011 seeks to leverage and build public-private partnerships (PPP) to increase the use of prevention care and treatment interventions that will prevent/mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS & TB in India. The Connect Project plays a facilitating role to encourage leadership and networking between the organized and unorganized private sector, NGOs and government facilities to provide the prevention to care continuum of services. The project focus geographies include Karnataka, Coastal Andhra Pradesh and six port towns Mumbai, Vashi, Mangalore, Tuticorin, Chennai and Visakhapatnam.

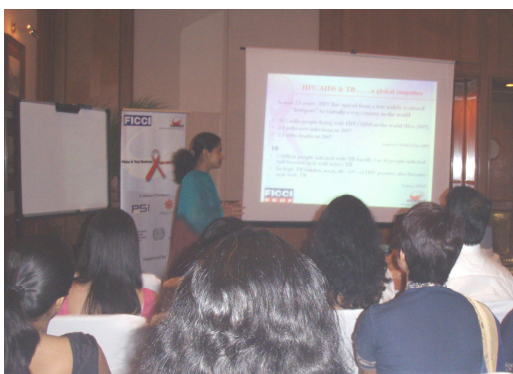
Project Connect is a consortium of like-minded, experienced organizations like FICCI-SEDF, Population Services International (PSI), YR Gaitonde Center for AIDS Research (YRGCARE) and Education and Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT).

One of the roles of the FICCI-SEDF and PSI Connect is towards sensitising of Corporates on the issue, through workplace intervention programs. These range from the training of management and blue-collared employees, to helping companies develop policies and programs on HIV and AIDS & TB. This activity has been primarily carried out in Karnataka, wherein more than fifty formal sector companies have conducted workplace programs. These programs have also been carried out for stakeholders at workshops and seminars across the project area.

As a part of this strategy, the FICCI-Connect team contacted Powergear Ltd., one of the leading manufacturers of power generation related equipments. Established in 1980, the company has a workforce of over 350 employees spread over its three facilities in Bangalore, Chennai and Hindupur (Karnataka - AP Border).

Journey of Partnering with FICCI- Connect for Workplace Program

Given the focus on productivity and profitability and the sensitive nature of the issue, the management of the company was hesitant to undertake Workplace Intervention Programs initially. The attitude reflected was that no one in the company was of the nature or background to either be infected or affected by HIV. Hence time and resources need not be invested on the same. However through a series of dialogue, commencing with the pitch presentation, the company management was convinced to at least initiate training in the Bangalore unit.



Consequently in October 2008, the training sessions were rolled out in the company. The FICCI- Connect team conducted four awareness sessions in all one for the senior managers and three for rest of the employees. Of the 100 odd employees in this unit, including the corporate office, around 80 employees (Senior and middle management + blue collared employees) participated in the awareness sessions.

Post these trainings, the management began observing changes in behaviour in their workers and their attitude towards protecting themselves and their community.

While before training the employees were hesitant about discussing HIV and AIDS and viewed it as a moral issue, after training, the myths and misconceptions around HIV and AIDS were dispelled and employees started to talk about the topic more openly. In the course of these trainings and follow ups, the company also began to recognise , how such a training can help create awareness on HIV/AIDS and eventually keep the workforce and their families healthy.

Recognizing the importance of such an initiative, the company signed the policy on HIV and AIDS & TB in May 2009. The Management also decided to extend this programme to their other units commencing with the Hindupur Unit at Andhra Pradesh. Training was completed there by the FICCI-Connect team in May 2008. With the signing of the policy, the team engaged the Powergear Management in a dialogue to set up a coordination committee in the company; the focus being to establish in-house resource to equip the company to respond to HIV and AIDS & TB at all levels in the company. A terms of reference for the Coordination Committee was shared with the management. Through a series of dialogue and support based follow up sessions, Powergear established



its coordination committee in September 2009, and had its first meeting on September 25, 2009. This is an experimental space for them, but a space that is gradually and consistently evolving. The aim for both Powergear and Connect is that this group drives the company's response to HIV and AIDS & TB mitigation within the company setup as well within the external communities it impacts. The coordination committee meets on the last Friday of every month to roll out and review strategies. FICCI-Connect offers support to Powergear to take this forward.

Mark of Positive Change

The trainings, signing up the policy, formation of the Coordination Committee for HIV and AIDS & TB and constant support and dialogue with Powergear has begun reflecting a change in the attitude of the management and workers towards the issue in general and more specifically to HIV infected persons.

In conclusion

The above instance stands as an example of the journey of change Powergear Ltd has undergone, since it entered into partnership with FICCI-Connect. From being a company which, out of fear of social perception and sanction, was absolutely closed to the idea that HIV and AIDS & TB are threats to its human infrastructure, today it stands as a beacon to its peers for not only having acknowledged that HIV and AIDS & TB has potential impact on its human resource, but also for having so proactively committed to fight it. It has done so by reaching out to it workers in terms of giving awareness, supporting them through the testing of their HIV and TB status and creating systems within the company to establish an environment that not only fights the infection but also nurtures its people. The partnership of FICCI-Connect with Powergear has indeed imbibed the mission of equipping the workplace to proactively and positively combat HIV/AIDS and TB.