

HIV/AIDS Programs in the Workplace in Ethiopia
Using Rapid Results Initiatives (RRIs)
Collaboration between the Rapid Results Institute and EBCA

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September 21, 2011

The mission of the Ethiopian Business Coalition Against HIV/AIDS (www.ebca-hiv.org) is to coordinate and strengthen the business community's response to the disease.

Starting in 2008, the Rapid Results Institute helped EBCA and its member companies design, launch and support approximately 30 RRIs. Each RRI focused on helping a company strengthen one or more elements of its workplace program for the prevention and treatment of the disease. Most companies focused on starting or expanding voluntary counseling and testing services (VCT) to employees and family members. However, the work wasn't just about getting people tested. As part of RRIs, companies formed HIV/AIDS committees, created policies and started care & support programs. In their efforts to reach 100-day goals, each team quickly built innovative and effective workplace programs that are unique to their company's specific circumstances. Here are some highlights:

- Prefabricated Building Parts Construction Enterprise, realized the most effective way to reaching their goal (extending VCT services to 70% of employees) was to build their own clinic. They immediately went into action. By the end of the 100 days, they had tested 90% of their staff (900 people). The clinic has since been opened to other companies and operates with little support from the public sector (Contact: Ato Seife Mergia, RRI Team Leader, email can be obtained from EBCA).
- Despite a budget freeze and a 20% monthly inflation rate, Crown Can and Cork found ways to maintain their Care & Support program for HIV+ employees. As part of their RRI, the team implemented creative ideas including opening up a small chicken breeding operation on unused company land, creating bulk purchase agreements with food vendors and selling non-hazardous production waste to recyclers. This enabled them to maintain and expand on their support programs to HIV+ employees despite the budget crunch. (Contact: Tadesse Tekallign tadesse53@yahoo.com, Former HR Director at Crown and Current Executive Director of EBCA)
- TOTAL-Ethiopia and DKT (a reproductive health non-profit) used their RRI to design and implement a creative public-private partnership. The partnership, called "Kerosene and Condoms" provided free condoms to anyone purchasing Kerosene at a designated TOTAL station. As Kerosene is the "fuel of the poor" in Ethiopia and used predominately for cooking (and hence more likely to be purchased by women), this turned out to be an effective targeting mechanism. The joint TOTAL/DKT RRI team decided to start a program where individuals purchasing five liters of kerosene at the station received free condoms and condom education services. The project resulted in distributing condoms and providing condom education services to approximately 15,000 people, in about 100 days. There is also anecdotal evidence that the overall sales in the station increased during the RRI period. (see <http://www.ethiopianreview.com/articles/4574>) Contact: Ken Divelbess kdivelbess@yahoo.com, former Manager at DKT-Ethiopia.

- Like Crown Can and Cork, several companies decided to focus on building their care and support programs for HIV positive employees during their second round of RRIs, after their initial VCT RRI. One company created a vegetable garden and formalized a solidarity fund in which employees and the company contributed a small percentage of their salaries to support HIV positive employees (past, present and future). One team working in this area was so inspired by their RRI goal that the team continued to work on it despite the fact that the team's employer went bankrupt soon after the project was launched.

Beyond the individual 100-day examples, there were other benefits and observations worth noting:

- Proof points and an expectation that companies could organize projects that resulted in most of their employees using VCT services. Most on-going workplace programs prior to this work resulted in 25% of the employees getting tested. Companies doing RRIs to "turbo-charge" averaged 75%. Our hunch is that there was a contagion effect in companies who had not participated in this, though we were not able to track and verify this.
- A Wealth of "home grown" innovations and examples: A case in point: As part of its RRI, Kaliti Construction, which also makes furniture, started giving a new bed to any employees going on wedding-leave, if they and their partner got tested before getting married. Other companies picked this idea up as well as other ideas for low-cost incentives developed by other RRI teams.
- The concrete, near-term goals created a feeling of excitement. For example, the staff at the Construction Company found a 100 day effort to test 900 employees more exciting than a six-month effort to "reduce stigma associated with HIV." And since the solution was not prescribed but emerged from the team, the team felt empowered to come up – and execute – on the idea of building a VCT center. Indeed they did it because they felt it was the most cost-effective way to reach their goal. In most of the companies, this excitement about achieving a concrete goal went viral, extending beyond the RR team. The goal of each team became a company-wide effort and a matter of company pride. This was especially the case since by design, all the teams were launched in one event, and were brought together at the 50-day mark to review progress and learning jointly. So this game-like sense of competition and peer pressure propelled the teams – and the companies – to go further than they otherwise would have.