

Ato Ulzen-Appiah

Policies for Institutions

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Zambians die earlier than people anywhere else in the world. ²Hence, caring for the young professionals in the country is crucial to its development and economy. Unemployment is at 50% and many of the employed are in civil institutions. In order to fight the HIV-AIDS epidemic which will eventually kill half of the population³, companies and civil institutions have to focus more attention and resources on halting and controlling the spread and effect of the disease.

This can be done through getting various companies and civil institutions to educate workers, sponsor healthcare and provide support for its employees. Below are some guidelines as to how these goals can be met and the procedures carried out. HIV-

AIDS education should be added to the training program for new hires and employees. This should detail what HIV-AIDS is, dispel myths and superstitions about it, explain how it is contracted and how it can be prevented, describe what testing entails and what to do when one contracts the virus as well as the availability of testing. The education segment should also stress ethics and how to treat other employees who may have contracted AIDS in the workplace

On the financial side, the institutions should sponsor free testing for workers. Otherwise, it should subsidize it. Above all, it should encourage its employees to get tested. It should also provide condoms for free or at subsidized prices. They should also sponsor HIV-AIDS and marriage counseling at the workplace. The companies and civil institutions should also provide access to anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) that attack the virus and can dramatically reduce AIDS deaths.

More than 80% of Zambia's population consider themselves religious. A lot of Zambians are unemployed or are self-employed so it is very important to reach them outside the workplace. Most of these people commit to their religions and are influenced by their leaders and messages. Religious settings are strategic places to continue the fight against HIV-AIDS. These institutions mostly preach good morality and behavior and sometimes lose sight of the need to fight the AIDS menace in other ways.

In nearby Zimbabwe, former president Kenneth Kaunda, championed condom use in the fight against AIDS and came under harsh criticisms from religious bodies. Kaunda had lost his own son to the AIDS disease. He challenged the religious bodies to join the state in controlling the AIDS disease by saying that he knew of religious leaders who had die to AIDS.

Religious bodies, especially churches advocate for the first letter of the **ABC** campaign (concept) in fighting AIDS: **A**bstinence, **B**e faithful and **C**ondomise. It is critical for them to achieve a healthy balance of using the various methods to fight AIDS.

The following are a few ways religious groups can help fight the AIDS epidemic. They should encourage voluntary testing for HIV-AIDS. They should also discourage stigmatization in religious settings. The church, mosques, etc should ensure that people with HIV-AIDS should not be treated as criminals and treated fairly. They should also sponsor free testing or subsidize it.

Religious bodies should encourage voluntary testing by giving incentives for those who get tested. Badges, free religious material, or acknowledgment could be used as incentives.

Youth groups in religious settings also have major roles to play in helping stem the spread of HIV-AIDS. Using the youth to preach the tenets of AIDS education is important, since many of the youth are affected and they would be able to influence their colleagues. They can organize rallies on HIV-AIDS and health-related issues to enlighten and educate members and other people in the religious group.

Most youth groups do a lot of entertainment related programs in religious settings. They should use their talents to perform theatrical pieces on HIV-AIDS and sing composed songs (through choirs as well) to educate members about the AIDS menace. They should also educate various age groups on sex education (using the ABC concept) to help stem the contraction of the virus.

The religious groups should also organize contests to encourage composing songs and writing letters/essays to help in the fight against HIV-AIDS and honoring excellent contributions. In their education campaign, they can hold seminars and discussions to talk about HIV-AIDS, the condoms debate, stigmatization etc. Pastors and religious leaders should not shy away from talking about HIV-AIDS in their sermons since religious groups are not any significantly less vulnerable to the menace. They should use their influence and power to preach abstinence, faithfulness to partners and advocate condom use for marriage couples. They should encourage and be encouraged to attend inter-faith conferences (with and without chiefs and politicians) to discuss and come to a working consensus about moral issues and legislation.

They should provide access to anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) that attack the virus and can dramatically reduce AIDS deaths. They should also make condoms available freely to sexually active church members. Clinics, hospitals and healthcare institutions are major proponents in the fight against the HIV-AIDS menace. They should sponsor and provide free testing and free condoms as well as provide access to anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) that attack the virus and can dramatically reduce AIDS deaths.

Health professionals should provide education and support programs. They should also encourage other institutions like churches, mosques, schools and companies to introduce, continue and maintain their education programs about sex and AIDS. Since they are mostly at the forefront of controlling the disease, they should make sex education and HIV-AIDS compulsory before testing. They should also provide free counseling/support for those who test positive.

For marriage counseling/advice, they should provide advice for women and men caught in marriages with partners who are HIV positive. Partners should be educated about mother-to-child transmission and child-bearing with infected parents. Healthcare institutions should institute women empowerment programs along with pro-woman counseling/campaigns.

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