Partnership with the private sector

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The private sector has an important role to play in the global, regional and national response to AIDS. It is in the private sector’s own interest to actively combat the expanding epidemic because it affects employees, customers and others in their communities. By working in partnership with the public and nongovernmental sectors, companies can help to make their efforts more effective and bring benefits to all parties concerned.

UNAIDS, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS, is well aware that the fight against AIDS cannot succeed without a broad-based effort involving all members of society, including the private sector. An important part of the mission of UNAIDS is therefore to promote and broker partnerships among the public, private and nongovernmental sectors of society that can help create a more coordinated, effective and sustainable response to HIV/AIDS.

From research carried out by UNAIDS with two leading business networks – the Prince of Wales Business Leaders’ Forum and the Conference Board – it appears that companies around the world are responding actively to the epidemic by educating and empowering their workforces, disseminating information to their customers and making resources available for community-based initiatives. In doing so, these companies hope to reduce their operating costs in regions affected by AIDS and at the same time to enhance their profile as leaders in their communities and internationally.

The public and nongovernmental sectors are valuable partners for the private sector. The public sector can also ensure a supportive and encouraging legislative and administrative environment for companies seeking to take action concerning the epidemic. Nongovernmental organizations can provide training and other support for private companies and collaborate with them in community and customer activities. In return, private sector companies can use their special skills, resources and networks in joint projects with nongovernmental organizations for HIV awareness, prevention and care initiatives.

Identifying partners

UNAIDS is supporting these efforts by brokering partnerships among the private, public and nongovernmental sectors, as well as by providing technical information, such as “best practices” information on successful corporate sector initiatives both at and beyond the workplace, as well as information about the impact of the epidemic around the world. Through its contacts with nongovernmental organizations worldwide and regionally, UNAIDS is helping companies to identify partners who could encourage private sector firms in their response to HIV/AIDS.

A major component of the UNAIDS strategy in this respect is the development of a Global Business Council on HIV/AIDS and related regional or national business councils. These councils offer a forum for companies to exchange information and experiences about their approaches regarding AIDS, and allow the private sector to develop a coherent and coordinated “business voice” for discussions with the public sector on relevant issues.

In the words of Nelson Mandela at the launch of the Global Business Council on HIV/AIDS in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 23 October 1997: “The challenge of AIDS can be overcome if we work together as a global community. All sectors and all spheres of society have to be involved as equal partners ... Now is the time to work together to combat AIDS. Let us join hands together in a caring partnership for health and prosperity as we enter the new millennium.”

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