Why this Guide was Developed

This guide is aimed at companies operating in developing countries and emerging markets. It is based on the premise that even though much progress has been made globally to slow the pace of new HIV infections and to increase the proportion of those needing AIDS medicines who receive them, HIV/AIDS still poses huge challenges—challenges that many countries aren’t equipped to overcome. In those contexts, companies fill critical gaps in prevention, care and treatment that governments do not have the resources to contend with.

According to the United Nations, nearly 65 million people have been infected with HIV since the start of the epidemic in the 1980s, and an estimated 25 million have died of AIDS-related illnesses.¹ In recent years the global epidemic has begun to stabilize: The annual number of new HIV infections declined from 3.0 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2007.² AIDS deaths are expected to begin to decline by about 2012.³

Despite these positive developments in prevention and treatment, AIDS still imposes a huge economic burden. Untreated, AIDS kills primarily young and middle-aged adults during their peak productive and reproductive years. At the macro level, AIDS reduces disposable incomes, savings rates, investment and consumer spending. With treatment, HIV-positive individuals can continue to feel well and work productively in their jobs, but AIDS medicines are expensive.

At the micro level, companies feel the greatest impact of HIV/AIDS through their workforce, with direct consequences for their bottom line. These include increased expenditures on medical and health insurance, funeral costs and death benefits, and the time and cost of recruiting and training new employees to replace lost personnel. In high prevalence areas, companies that take no action see their revenues, and ultimately profits, decrease as a result of higher absenteeism and staff turnover, reduced productivity, declining morale, and a shrinking consumer base. Even companies that do take action may find that their cost of doing business increases because suppliers and distributors are affected, leading to similar disruptions in the supply chain.

The global HIV/AIDS epidemic has reached into every corner of society, affecting parents, children and youth, teachers and health workers, rich and poor. The good news is that highly effective AIDS medicines known as antiretrovirals (or ARVs) now reach 42% of those around the world who need them in low- and middle-income countries. Between 2003 and 2008, access to antiretroviral drugs in such countries increased 10-fold, thanks in large part to donor-funded programs. Yet, governments in low and middle-income countries cannot afford to meet the remaining need, which means that companies committed to protecting the health of their workers must spend their own resources to do so.

Co-authored by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GBC), “Fighting HIV/AIDS in the Workplace: A Company Management Guide” is the product of the IFC’s ongoing commitment to sustainable development and GBC’s mandate to catalyze business action to fight HIV/AIDS. Targeting the private sector operating in developing countries, the document provides practical guidance and a range of options to companies based on corporate experiences and the efforts and expertise of IFC’s program, IFC Against AIDS, and GBC, for designing and implementing prevention and care programs to support company employees and the communities in which they work and live.

Though the past ten years have witnessed a huge growth in the establishment and diversity of workplace HIV/AIDS programs, good practice approaches are still evolving and reflect an ongoing learning process. The examples in this document come from publicly available sources such as agency publications and company Web sites, and include the experiences of IFC, its clients, and GBC and its members.

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6The authors have not verified the accuracy of the information or the companies’ practices; all information included herein is provided in good faith.