



# Mainstreaming HIV in the Transport Sector

Since 2003, it is a policy of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) that all German Development Cooperation (GDC) programmes and projects in sub-Saharan Africa mainstream HIV, at least in countries with generalized epidemics<sup>1</sup> and especially in countries where HIV prevalence is five percent or more. Any mainstreaming HIV interventions must be planned and conducted jointly with GDC's partner organisations and be aligned with the partner country's sectoral strategies and national HIV strategy, thus adhering to the "Three Ones" principles. These require development partners to work through one national HIV strategy, one national HIV coordinating body and one national HIV Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system.

The transport sector includes but is not limited to the road freight industry, road construction and maintenance, railways, ports and shipping, passenger transport, and aviation. Cross-border trade, although vital for economic growth, also opens avenues for broader spread of the HIV infection.

This guidance note discusses the *intersection of HIV and the transport sector and suggests ways* in which programmes and projects in this sector can mainstream HIV.

## What is the impact of the HIV epidemic on the sector?

**Transport workers are at high risk for HIV infection and sexually transmitted infections (STIs):** Their vulnerability, especially in the case of long-distance truck drivers, has been well documented and stems from a number of interacting factors (Lichtenstein et al, 2008; Bal et al, 2007; Malta et al, 2006; Kulis et al, 2004; Ramjee and Gouws, 2002). Most are still in their sexually active years and have little formal education or HIV awareness. They spend considerable



time away from home and their wives or regular girlfriends and they often engage in multiple sexual relations with commercial sex workers and other women, while using condoms inconsistently. They are also often heavy users of alcohol and drugs (IOM and UNAIDS, 2005).

### The longer the journey, the greater the danger of HIV infection:

Truckers have to stop at border crossings and checkpoints to go through customs procedures and these are often so bureaucratic that they require stopovers lasting for several days. Long stopovers provide many temptations to use alcohol and drugs and to engage in sexual relations and this puts them and their sexual partners at risk of HIV infection.

### Limited access to health services:

Though they are more exposed to the risk of HIV infection, transport workers are less likely to have access to health services because their work is characterized by mobility and heavy work schedules. They are a particularly difficult population to reach with HIV prevention, testing and treatment (Dodson and Crush, 2006).

<sup>1</sup>In a generalized epidemic, HIV is firmly established in the general population. Although sub-populations at high risk may continue to contribute disproportionately to the spread of HIV, sexual networking in the general population is sufficient to sustain an epidemic.

**Loss of trained staff due to HIV-related morbidity and mortality:** Many enterprises and organizations in the transport sector feel the impact of the disease through loss of workers, absenteeism, and increased medical and recruitment costs. Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV (PLHIV) can also have an impact on morale and productivity of the sector's workers (ITF, no date).

**Sexual networks of multiple concurrent partnerships are a major driver of the epidemic within the transport sector:** Traditionally available in ports and along transport routes, commercial sex workers are a significant part of many transport workers' sexual networks. Also part of these networks are local women who engage in transactional sex, expecting their partners to spend money on them. Back home, transport workers have wives and regular girlfriends and they, too, are often part of sexual networks, turning to other men when their husbands and regular boyfriends are absent. The combined result is sometimes a "super-highway" of HIV infection.

### **How could your work in the transport sector inadvertently contribute to the spread of HIV?**

**People living and working in ports or along truck routes are at high risk of contracting HIV:** Ports, truck stops, cross-border towns, and market towns where truckers congregate on market days often have bars and lodging frequented not only by sailors and truckers but also by migrant workers, long-distance travellers and visitors from nearby communities. They attract commercial sex workers and tempt locals to participate in transactional sex. When heavy alcohol and drug use are added to the mix these places can become epicentres of HIV transmission.

**Transport workers can act as bridges between high and low prevalence populations:** Mobility is a key driver of the HIV epidemic (Lagarde, 2003) and it is the essence of transportation, linking urban and rural areas and communities within countries and across countries. As well as transporting people and goods between these places, transport workers can transport HIV infection.

**Road construction can improve connections between low and high prevalence countries:** Road construction can open access to regions difficult to reach, facilitating the transportation of people and goods and, also, of HIV infection. Thus, while creating new opportunities,

road construction also creates new risks.

### **In what ways could your work in the sector contribute to curbing the spread of HIV or to mitigating its impacts?**

**Advocating for and supporting the development and implementation of HIV workplace policies:** The loss of staff due to HIV-infection can be avoided through implementation of HIV workplace policies for the transport sector. Such policies can cover prevention, treatment and impact mitigation and can require a working environment free from stigma and discrimination against PLHIV.

The active participation of government departments (e.g. ministries of labour, highways or transportation) can back up such interventions with organizational support and resources. The same is true of transport owners' associations and workers' unions. Unions can fight stigma and discrimination and lobby for better care and support, including HIV testing and treatment for their members.

**Targeting vulnerable populations with tailor-made prevention:** Transport workers, commercial sex workers, young people who participate in transactional sex, and the spouses and other regular partners of transport workers may all require prevention measures particular to their situations. The most effective prevention programmes or projects will often be tailor-made and developed in consultation with vulnerable groups. They will also often be cross-border, sub-regional or regional, addressing situations found all along transportation routes.

**Advocating for better access to health services for transport workers:** Health centres stationed at stops along highways can provide truckers with opportunities to acquire prevention information and condoms and to get tested and treated for STIs. Challenges may include countering the stigma associated with STIs and finding creative ways of ensuring follow-up for people who are constantly on the move.

Wellness centres at major truck stops and in ports and railway stations are also possibilities. In such centres, transport workers might find clean accommodation, nutritious food, harmless entertainment, and opportunities to acquire condoms plus HIV and STI information, education and communications (IEC) material. They might also find opportunities for voluntary and confidential testing (VCT) for HIV and STIs, as well as treatment for STIs, opportunistic infections and minor injuries. Wellness centres at these strategic places can be life-savers (WFP, 2006) and, with the participation of transport unions, business,

government and others they can make substantial contributions to the general well-being of transport workers (ITF, no date).

### **Supporting transport workers as agents of change:**

Transportation networks can, for example, become condom distribution networks and peer education networks through which preventive education and supplies can be spread and reach not only transport workers but also commercial sex workers, young people and others.

### **Including clauses for HIV prevention activities in construction contracts:**

The inclusion of HIV prevention clauses is now standard procedure in road construction contracts in sub-Saharan Africa and comprises an integral part of the national standard services catalogue. These clauses may require that a contractor supply its employees with condoms on a construction site, make HIV information available to its employees and provide HIV awareness raising events put on by a competent NGO. In **Ghana**, during the construction of the Tema-Akatsi road, the clauses required measures such as those and also HIV education of communities living along this road.

### **A GDC Example from Niger**

Eight years after Niger's first attempt at condom social marketing failed because it offended religious conservatives, GDC through German Development Bank (KfW) made it possible to launch a new Social Marketing Project in 2003. The project borrowed from tradition to find a brand name and recruited a national sports hero to launch and promote the new brand.

In the 1990s, with support from CARE, truckers' syndicates began establishing Anti-AIDS Kiosks at major truck stops in Niger and now, with additional support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Global Fund, there are 17 of these kiosks and eight more planned. These kiosks are key partners of the Social Marketing Project, wholesaling its condoms to vendors in surrounding communities and playing essential roles in its behaviour change communications (BCC). The Project provides each kiosk with two trained animators and they organize and animate interactive communications both within the kiosk and in the surrounding community (GDC, 2009).

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## Further Reading

A selection of articles on mainstreaming HIV in the transport sector can be found on the GDC Mainstreaming HIV internet platform at <http://sites.google.com/a/ms-hiv-gdc.org/mainstreaming-hiv-in-german-development-cooperation/Home/sectors-priority-areas/transport>. To join the Group, visit <http://ms.hiv.aids.googlepages.com/home>.

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