



HIV/AIDS Policy

Sabuj Sangha

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West Bengal



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1.0 Overview

Sabuj Sangha's HIV/AIDS has been developed to respect and protect the rights and integrity of all people in relation to HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is a major epidemic, both nationally and internationally. It poses as massive threat to development and social progress. Aside from the suffering it imposes on individuals and families, it also affects the most productive segment of society, the labour force.

With this in mind, Sabuj Sangha feels that it is essential to have a suitable HIV/AIDS policy in place. The policy aims to reduce the risks and vulnerability of staff, promote a health workplace environment free from discrimination, and to ensure conceptual clarity on HIV/AIDS among all staff.

The policy incorporates the International Labour Organisation's Guiding Principles and outlines its own strategies for policy implementation.

2.0 Background

2.1 Sabuj Sangha

Sabuj Sangha is a non-profit, non-government development organisation working in West Bengal, India. It was established in 1975 in the Sundarban region of West Bengal. From its humble beginnings, Sabuj Sangha has grown into a vibrant organisation working with a range of people across multiple sectors. It currently works in the following focus areas:

- Health and Nutrition
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- Education and Protection
- Livelihood and Women's Empowerment
- Environment and Disaster Response

Sabuj Sangha seeks to improve the lives of people less fortunate through participation and empowerment. We believe that partnership is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring that all people are given a fair and equal chance.

Aside from direct programme implementation, Sabuj Sangha is involved in research, documentation, advocacy and networking. It also works with Government to enact change and ensure people have access to their most basic human rights.

2.2 HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS epidemic constitutes one of the most formidable challenges to development and social progress. The epidemic exacerbates poverty and inequality, and increases the burden on the most vulnerable people in society i.e. the elderly, the women, children and the poor.

Countries and organizations that do not respond in time have to bear huge costs on public and private sector enterprises through declining productivity, loss of skilled and experienced labour and increased expenditures on employee treatment and associated costs as the demand for public services increases. National economies, as seen in the severely affected regions like the sub-Saharan Africa, have experienced the impact on virtually every sector.



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HIV/AIDS in India

According to NACO an estimated 2.31 million people in India were living with HIV/AIDS in the year 2007 (88.7% adults in 15-49 years, 7.5% aged 50 and above and 3.5% children below 15 years). The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the country is 0.34%. Women account for 39% of HIV burden in the country. 8 states have HIV prevalence greater than the national average. India has been successful in containing the overall prevalence of the epidemic. However, there is no room for complacency as the epidemic spreads from high risk groups to general populations, from men to women and from urban to rural areas¹.

2.3 Sabuj Sangha and HIV/AIDS

Sabuj Sangha employs over 230 staff spreading over multiple districts, namely South 24 Parganas(s), Jalpaiguri and Kolkata. Sabuj Sangha works with a varied range of people, including extremely vulnerable migrant groups, giving rise to the need to develop a policy, addressing the major issue that is HIV/AIDS. Given its wide spread of geographical focus and the range of people that are involved, Sabuj Sangha feels that it is essential to minimise the risks of HIV/AIDS and reduce the stigma and discrimination attached to HIV/AIDS through prevention.

3.0 Objectives of the Policy

The key objectives of the policy are:

- To reduce the risks and vulnerability of all the staffs of Sabuj Sangha to HIV/AIDS.
- To promote and ensure a healthy work environment, free from discrimination on the basis of HIV/AIDS within the organisation.
- To ensure conceptual clarity on HIV/AIDS through constant orientation and information dissemination.

4.0 Guiding Principles

The policy adopts the guiding principles, as set out by the International Labour Organisation Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work. The guiding principles are:

1. HIV/AIDS, a Workplace Issue

HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue, and should be treated like any other serious illness/condition in the workplace. This is necessary not only because it affects the workforce, but also because the workplace, being part of the local community, has a role to play in the wider struggle to limit the spread and effects of the epidemic.

2. Non-Discrimination

In the spirit of decent work and respect for the human rights and dignity of persons infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, there should be no discrimination against workers on the basis of real

¹ Ministry of Labour and Employment, India – “National Policy on HIV/AIDS and the world of Work”, 2007



or perceived HIV status. Discrimination and stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS inhibits efforts aimed at promoting HIV/AIDS prevention.

3. Gender Equality

The gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS should be recognized. Women are more likely to become infected and are more often adversely affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic than men due to biological, socio-cultural and economic reasons. The greater the gender discrimination in societies and the lower the position of women, the more negatively they are affected by HIV. Therefore, more equal gender relations and the empowerment of women are vital to successfully prevent the spread of HIV infection and enable women to cope with HIV/AIDS.

4. Healthy Work Environment

The work environment should be healthy and safe, so far as is practicable, for all concerned parties, in order to prevent transmission of HIV, in accordance with the provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155). A healthy work environment facilitates optimal physical and mental health in relation to work and adaptation of work to the capabilities of workers in light of their state of physical and mental health.

5. Social Dialogue

The successful implementation of an HIV/AIDS policy and programme requires cooperation and trust between employers, workers and their representatives and government, where appropriate, with the active involvement of workers infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

6. Screening for Purposes of Exclusion From Employment or Work Processes

HIV/AIDS screening should not be required of job applicants or persons in employment.

7. Confidentiality

There is no justification for asking job applicants or workers to disclose HIV-related personal information. Nor should co-workers be obliged to reveal such personal information about fellow workers. Access to personal data relating to a worker's HIV status should be bound by the rules of confidentiality consistent with the ILO's code of practice on the protection of workers' personal data, 1997.

8. Continuation of Employment Relationship

HIV infection is not a cause for termination of employment. As with many other conditions, persons with HIV-related illnesses should be able to work for as long as medically fit in available, appropriate work.

9. Prevention

HIV infection is preventable. Prevention of all means of transmission can be achieved through a variety of strategies which are appropriately targeted to national conditions and which are culturally sensitive. Prevention can be furthered through changes in behaviour, knowledge, treatment and the creation of a non-discriminatory environment.

The social partners are in a unique position to promote prevention efforts particularly in relation to changing attitudes and behaviours through the provision of information and education, and in addressing socio-economic factors.



10. Care and Support

Solidarity, care and support should guide the response to HIV/AIDS in the world of work. All workers, including workers with HIV, are entitled to affordable health services. There should be no discrimination against them and their dependants in access to and receipt of benefits from statutory social security programmes and occupational schemes.

5.0 Commitment

Through this policy, Sabuj Sangha is committed to adhering to principles outlined above. Sabuj Sangha's HIV/AIDS policy includes:

5.1 Non-Discrimination

Sabuj Sangha will promote a non-discriminatory workplace environment at all times. There will be no discrimination towards workers on the basis of HIV/AIDS. Employees with real or perceived HIV/AIDS status are entitled to the same conditions, benefits and terms of employment.

5.2 Gender Equality

Rules, regulations and support will be equal for both males and females.

5.3 Healthy Work Environment and Social Dialogue

Sabuj Sangha will promote a positive, healthy work environment at all times. The organisation will encourage social dialogue, promote active involvement and provide necessary platforms to facilitate social dialogue.

5.4 Recruitment and Employment Process

Sabuj Sangha believes that skills, knowledge and expertise are the only criteria that should be considered throughout the employment process including the recruitment, renewal and promotion of staff.

5.5 Confidentiality

Sabuj Sangha will ensure confidentiality at all levels. Staff are not required to disclose HIV-related personal information. Any information relating to a person's HIV/AIDS status should remain confidential.



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5.6 Prevention and Care and Support

HIV/AIDS issues will be included within the in-house trainings, meetings, etc. HIV/AIDS Policy will be disseminated to all staff and shared with new staff during their induction. Employees living with HIV/AIDS will be linked up with the existing Government health care facilities for care and support.

6.0 Strategies for Policy Implementation

6.1 Core-Team

A core-team will be established and act as point persons within the organisation for all things related to HIV/AIDS. The team will be responsible for policy implementation at all levels, promoting the principles set out in the policy and ensuring that all staff are aware of their individual responsibilities.

6.2 Information

Sabuj Sangha will collect and disseminate appropriate information relating to HIV/AIDS, including information leaflets, media articles, and state, national and international reports, to all staff.

6.3 Awareness Workshops

The organisation is committed to promoting social dialogue. With this in mind, awareness workshops on HIV/AIDS will be conducted by the organisation. The Core-Team will be involved in the design, development and delivery of all workshops.

6.4 Policy Review

The HIV/AIDS policy will be reviewed annually. The Core-Team will be responsible for conducting the policy review. Any amendments will be reviewed by the Governing Body and adopted if appropriate.