

Business and AIDS in China

A Strategic Planning Exercise

Prepared by the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS and Booz Allen Hamilton

China is in a unique position to proactively address HIV/AIDS while rates of infection are still relatively low (0.07%). Businesses have the opportunity to not only prevent the growth of HIV/AIDS, but to help mitigate the long-term economic costs of the disease for both individual companies and China's economy. To date, the Chinese government has demonstrated significant leadership in implementing a national plan for HIV/AIDS prevention and control. To achieve its objectives, the government has called upon all sectors of society to join in the fight against HIV/AIDS. On March 18, 2005, the People's Republic of China Ministry of Health (MOH), in partnership with the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, hosted the Joint Summit on Business and AIDS in China. Vice Premier Wu Yi delivered the opening keynote address at the summit and called on all companies to take action against HIV/AIDS in China.

During the summit, business, government and civil society leaders participated in Business and AIDS in China: A Strategic Planning Exercise. The exercise, led by Booz Allen Hamilton and the first of its kind in China, brought together representatives of both foreign and domestic corporations, and HIV/AIDS experts from government and civil society, to develop and launch an Action Plan for Business on HIV/AIDS in China. The Action Plan is meant to serve as a framework to guide businesses in developing HIV/AIDS policies and programs.

Participants identified four critical imperatives in China's fight against HIV/AIDS: (1) continued government leadership; (2) guarantees of confidentiality and nondiscrimination; (3) stronger networks among the private sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government agencies; and (4) enhanced education for all sectors of society. During facilitated breakout sessions, participants worked together to recommend more than 50 specific actions the private sector can take to support the government objectives for AIDS prevention and control. Working in close partnership with the Chinese Ministry of Health, the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS will continue to support Chinese and foreign companies as they fight the epidemic in China.

The Strategic Planning Exercise

The exercise was jointly developed and hosted by the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GBC), Booz Allen Hamilton, APCO Worldwide, and Tsinghua University as part of the MOH and GBC Joint Summit on Business and

"To prevent and control HIV/AIDS is not only the obligation of the Chinese government, but also the common responsibility of the entire society, including the business sector... The Chinese government attaches great importance to the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS."

- Vice Premier and Minister of Health, Wu Yi, 18 March 2005

AIDS in China. The event brought together, for the first time, more than 190 leaders from foreign and domestic corporations, international organizations, domestic NGOs, and several government agencies to explore how the unique capabilities and resources of the private sector could be leveraged to support the government's plan for HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

Business participants included senior executives from companies in industries including manufacturing, media, consumer products, energy, mining, pharmaceutical, and medical supplies. Representing the government were officials from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor and Social Security, China Center for Disease Control, State Council Working Committee for AIDS Prevention and Control, National Center for AIDS/STD Prevention and Control, State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, People's Liberation Army, and the Chinese People's Armed Police Force. Civil society leaders from international institutions and NGOs were also in attendance, including Family Health International; Futures Group; Global Fund on AIDS, TB and Malaria; International Finance Corporation; International Labor Organization; PATH; Positive Art Workshop; UNAIDS; World Bank; World Vision; and 121 United Project.

The exercise's objective was to identify opportunities for businesses to support China's national plan for AIDS prevention and control by applying their core competencies. Participants were charged with developing solutions to support the government's six primary HIV/AIDS objectives: (1) Stronger Advocacy and Leadership; (2) HIV/AIDS Surveillance and Epidemic Reporting; (3) Education, Comprehensive Prevention, and Treatment; (4) Integrated Treatment, Support, and Care; (5) Stronger International and Multisectoral Cooperation; and (6) Increased Investments and Availability of Funding.

Participants were divided into teams, each assigned specific government objectives to address. Each team was made up of a diverse mix of representatives from all sectors. This allowed individuals to share their unique insights, challenges, and capabilities, and helped teams to develop comprehensive recommendations.

During two facilitated working sessions, teams sought to better understand China's HIV/AIDS epidemic, the government's plan for prevention and control, and how

each firm could contribute its expertise, resources, and capabilities. The first working session allowed teams to discuss each company's objectives and explore how businesses could promote and implement effective HIV/AIDS policies and programs. The second session encouraged participants to recommend, and commit to, specific steps they could take to support the government's HIV/AIDS programs in terms of actions, resources, and/or in-kind donations. During plenary sessions, the teams presented their key findings and most innovative action plans.

The exercise provided a forum for this diverse group of participants to engage in open and honest discussion about the unique issues facing companies in fighting AIDS in China. The highly collaborative nature of the working sessions allowed participants to better understand the perspectives of the different stakeholders represented on each team. Most important, participants developed a common viewpoint on the challenges that must be overcome to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic in China, and identified specific actions each sector, organization, and company can implement to advance the government's objectives for HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

Current Challenges to Fighting HIV/AIDS in China

During the exercise, participants worked to make actionable recommendations for HIV/AIDS policies and programs that could be implemented in their own companies. As part of this process, participants identified a set of challenges that limited their ability to assess the extent of the epidemic, determine critical needs, develop effective programs, and ensure the buy-in and support of their employees, shareholders, communities, and governments. These challenges were identified to help assess the way forward and build on extensive and positive leadership by the central government to date.

- While all participants recognized the significant efforts made by the People's Republic of China (PRC) government to prevent and control HIV/AIDS, they also recognized the need to extend the reach of current programs and regulations. Participants expressed concerns that there was limited knowledge of government programs and initiatives outside of Beijing, such as "4 Frees and 1 Care," a policy to provide testing, counseling, treatment, and economic support to those in need. They felt a continued effort is needed to ensure that

awareness of the disease, its causes, and specific government initiatives reach all levels of government. Government regulations must be communicated and enforced to prohibit discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and to protect HIV/AIDS patients' confidential health and medical information.

- Pervasive stigma and current methods of health service delivery present significant challenges to effective prevention, treatment, care, and support. There is a lack of fundamental understanding of HIV/AIDS and how it is spread in the general population. As in other countries, this leads to significant stigmatization of those associated with the disease, and many people are still fearful of interacting with someone who is HIV-positive. High-risk groups are usually isolated from mainstream society, making it more difficult to target prevention and treatment programs to those segments. Chinese healthcare practices also limit the efficacy of HIV/AIDS outreach that has proven effective in other countries; e.g., preventive health counseling is not a common practice in China—health counseling is usually only sought for treatment purposes. In addition, community involvement in healthcare, which has helped normalize HIV related services in other countries, is not a tradition in China.
- Effective delivery of HIV/AIDS programs and interventions is critically dependent on the general healthcare infrastructure and resources. Participants felt that China's healthcare infrastructure and resources must be scaled up, particularly in rural areas, to support the delivery of HIV/AIDS testing and treatment. In addition, they related that new antiretrovirals (ARVs) are not always widely available, and government programs to provide free ARVs are not well known outside of major cities. These factors make it particularly difficult to assess the extent of the epidemic, encourage testing and counseling, and provide treatments to prolong the lives of PLWHA and prevent further spread of the infection.
- Private sector response has been limited to date because of a lack of awareness of the disease, its impact, and effective interventions, as well as a reluctance to become involved because of the perception of peers, partners, and customers. Businesses in China have been slow to acknowledge

that HIV/AIDS is a problem relevant to the private sector, or recognize the potential negative impact of the disease on economic health and stability. HIV stigma and discrimination make business leaders reluctant to act independently to develop and implement HIV/AIDS initiatives; they need motivation and support from the government, NGOs, and other businesses. Even business leaders who are aware of the threats posed by HIV/AIDS often do not know what issues need to be addressed, what constitutes an effective corporate HIV/AIDS policy, or how to support the specific government objectives. Multinational corporations (MNCs) with existing HIV/AIDS policies are reluctant to implement them in China because they are unfamiliar with relevant regulations and are concerned their actions may be misinterpreted.

Imperatives for Collaborative Government and Business Action Against HIV/AIDS

As teams grappled to overcome the above challenges, four critical imperatives emerged for collaborative government and business action to fight HIV/AIDS in China. Each imperative stresses the importance of acting now, while the epidemic is still in the early stages, to prevent a more widespread HIV/AIDS crisis in the future (see Exhibit 1).

- Continued Government Leadership: Businesses are confident that continued government leadership will provide

Exhibit 1

Imperatives for Collaborative Government and Business Action Against HIV/AIDS in China



Source: Booz Allen Hamilton

the context for greater private sector involvement and action on HIV/AIDS. The relationship between the central government and the private sector is a close one, and continued commitment and action from the government on a range of HIV/AIDS issues, such as education, nondiscrimination, and treatment, may be the key to a robust private sector response.

Businesses are motivated to take action by the government—both by mandate and example. Fulfilling government requests and obeying mandates helps businesses build fruitful relationships with the central government. These favorable relationships with the government become an added incentive for business action on HIV/AIDS.

- **Confidentiality and Nondiscrimination:** A consistent framework for guaranteeing confidentiality and nondiscrimination in the workplace and society must be developed and implemented by business and government.

As in most countries, stigma and discrimination against PLWHA remains a problem in China. Therefore citizens seek assurances from the government and their employers that the confidentiality of their HIV status will be maintained. Indeed, ensuring confidentiality of a person's HIV status is the cornerstone of successful workplace and community policies and programs. Voluntary programs, such as testing, counseling, and peer education, have greater impact on employees when employer and government regulations protect the rights of HIV-positive people. Without such protections, employees fear they will lose their jobs and be ostracized from society. Employees are more likely to respond to and participate in employer HIV/AIDS programs if they are assured that their rights as employees will be protected.

Further, employees often refuse to work with people known to be HIV positive. Even with effective workplace HIV/AIDS policies, other employees' perceptions and behavior may prompt HIV-positive employees to quit. Employer-sponsored HIV programs must be developed to help destigmatize AIDS in the workplace.

- **Education for All: Learning about AIDS and Knowing Your Status:** Education in all sectors of society will ensure that government officials, employers, employees,

investors, and consumers have a clear understanding of HIV/AIDS, the epidemic, and its impact in China. This awareness, in turn, will support and enhance all other policies and programs, from nondiscrimination to treatment. All sectors of society will benefit from increased awareness. Effective education reduces high-risk behaviors, stigma, and discrimination; enhances technical knowledge of interventions; and supports HIV/AIDS policy development and workplace programming.

Employees need a basic understanding of HIV/AIDS, behavioral risk factors, and knowledge of their own HIV/AIDS status before they will be receptive to prevention, surveillance, and testing efforts. Well-informed officials will strengthen the government's ability to provide leadership on HIV/AIDS issues, therefore current educational initiatives must be continued and expanded to all levels of government. Healthcare professionals need better technical knowledge of HIV/AIDS, particularly in rural areas, where workers often lack basic training in HIV/AIDS testing and treatment. For business, technical training in HIV/AIDS policies and interventions could greatly enhance the private sector response. China's business leaders will be more likely to engage in the technical aspects of prevention efforts (e.g., surveillance and testing), if they have sufficient knowledge of the content and implementation of workplace programs.

For the general populace, a common understanding of HIV/AIDS and its causes, prevention methods, and treatment is also needed in China. Training, education, and counseling should be widely available in a variety of formats; providers should strive to target educational programs to the unique needs and preferences of different audiences, particularly through creative media messages and print advertising.

- **Private Sector, Government, and NGO Networks:** Networks among all sectors of society are essential components of private sector action. Lack of experience and resources were often cited as obstacles to private sector action against HIV/AIDS, and information sharing, group learning and partnerships could help remedy these deficiencies.

Links between the private sector and government are mutually beneficial—each can offer unique resources

to support the other's HIV/AIDS policies. The government can work with businesses to create a common framework for workplace policy, and together they can determine the issues that must be addressed. Guidance from NGOs with experience dealing with HIV/AIDS, and business networks such as the GBC, will encourage the sharing of information and best practices among businesses.

Businesses in China may be reluctant to dedicate resources to and bear additional costs for HIV/AIDS programs if their competitors are not doing the same. To help increase their confidence that they are not acting alone to fight HIV/AIDS, business can establish associations with other companies and organizations active in the cause.

Participants were highly supportive of the GBC, and expressed hopes that it would become more active in China to address such issues as helping the government and private sector draft confidentiality policies; sponsoring business roundtables around the country to improve information sharing; and providing links between businesses and NGOs that could help companies implement HIV programs.

The four critical imperatives for collaborative government and business action have been incorporated, as specific recommendations, into the Action Plan for Business on HIV/AIDS in China. The Action Plan was developed through the Joint Summit on Business and AIDS in China, and will serve as a framework to guide businesses in developing HIV/AIDS policies and programs.

Conclusions and Next Steps

China still has an opportunity to take proactive measures to prevent the kind of widespread HIV/AIDS epidemic that many countries are experiencing. Government, business, NGOs, and business networks such as the GBC must work together to implement the recommendations from the strategic planning exercise and support HIV/AIDS prevention and control in China. The private sector must also strive to advance the four imperatives for action by implementing the Action Plan.

The following next steps were identified as priorities for government, the GBC, and the private sector to

“If China can succeed where the rest of the world has failed in HIV prevention, it will be a massive incentive to businesses to continue to invest and be active here in China.”

- Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, President, Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, 18 March 2005

enhance the business response to HIV/AIDS in China, and achieve the government's objectives for AIDS prevention and control.

Collaboration with Government:

China's government should continue its demonstrated leadership on HIV/AIDS prevention and control. Education should remain a priority for all sectors—government, business, and civil society—and must include training to enhance technical knowledge and support implementation of policies and programs.

- The government should help the private sector set clear priorities for action against HIV/AIDS based on its own objectives. This will enable the government to manage the multisectoral response to HIV/AIDS and achieve its specific objectives.
- Public-private partnerships can help to encourage action by reducing the burden on any one sector or organization acting alone.
- The government should work with the business community to develop a national framework for workplace policies and programs.
- Perhaps most important, the government must raise awareness and improve enforcement of official guarantees of confidentiality and nondiscrimination against PLWHA.

Support from the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS

The GBC in China will directly support business action on HIV/AIDS through its new China office and act as a liaison between government and business on the issue. In this role, the GBC will assist in developing a coordinated and comprehensive business network and HIV/AIDS response. Participants in the exercise identified priority initiatives for the GBC as it establishes its presence in China:

- Provide forums for information sharing, technical support, and idea generation in provinces around China;
- Offer guidance in the development of a national framework for workplace programs; and
- Provide direct support to companies in developing comprehensive HIV/AIDS strategies that leverage their core competencies in the workplace and community.

New and Immediate Private Sector Action

The private sector must take advantage of the support provided by the government and the GBC to enhance its response to HIV/AIDS:

- Business leaders must educate themselves, their employees, and the community about HIV/AIDS: what it is, how it is spread, and how business can help to prevent a more widespread epidemic.

- Each company should establish an HIV/AIDS policy. Specifically, companies must work to destigmatize HIV/AIDS in the workplace and the community, and encourage all people to know their HIV status.
- Products and services, branding, and marketing all provide opportunities for companies to leverage core competencies to support the government objectives for fighting HIV/AIDS prevention and control.
- Businesses can also play a leadership role by advocating strongly for HIV/AIDS with the government and through their business networks.

Businesses need not take these actions on their own, but should strive to build partnerships with the government and NGOs to learn how to better leverage their core competencies in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

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