



**AfricaRice**

# **Workplace Policy on HIV/AIDS**

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## I. Preamble

The HIV/AIDS has escalated to unprecedented levels, affecting all aspects of development including agriculture. The CGIAR centers worldwide have decided to address the issue at their centers and in their core research agenda. HIV/AIDS undermine the efforts of CGIAR centers toward attaining food security for all, eradicating poverty, and protecting the environment. Therefore, AfricaRice management has a dual responsibility of protecting its staff from the pandemic and achieving its set goals and objectives. In this regard, AfricaRice management put forward the following declaration, principles and guidelines.

## II. Statement of Belief

AfricaRice has strong concern and responsibilities for the health and well-being of staff, rice-based farmer community in Africa and beyond both in the context of the HIV epidemic and other ailments that are related to agriculture. The AfricaRice management believes that: ...

- every worker<sup>1</sup> in the institution has a right to dignity, health and life.
- we all are affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic directly or indirectly.
- a proactive mitigation of the negative effects of the pandemic on food security in Africa and our center itself requires active participation of all, as well as the building of partnerships amongst communities, governments, legal, health and other institutions.
- our institutional policies and research out puts should enables, encourages and sustains the care and support of any of us, our collaborator or clientele affected by the pandemic.

This policy, and related information on HIV/AIDS, will be communicated to all AfricaRice workers using the full range of communication methods available.

The policy will be reviewed and revised in light of changing conditions and the findings of surveys/studies conducted.

## III. Guiding Principles

While AfricaRice recognizes that there are circumstances unique to HIV infection, this policy rests on the principle that HIV infection and AIDS should be treated like any other serious condition or illness that may affect employees. It takes into account the fact that employees with HIV may live full and active lives for years. AfricaRice's commitment to maintaining a safe and healthy work environment for all employees is based on the recognition that HIV is not transmitted by casual contact.

AfricaRice management hereby affirm that any action, whether personal or institutional aimed at mitigating the negative effects of HIV/AIDS on the institution's goal must be guided by the following principles<sup>2</sup>

- **Engagement:** Every worker in the institution *and collaborators* are affected, directly or indirectly by the pandemic, and therefore should respond with commitment, concern, courage and hope.
- **Non-discrimination:** AfricaRice does not tolerate discrimination against worker or job applicants on any grounds, including HIV status. Every worker in the institution directly affected by the epidemic would remain an integral part of the institution, with the right of equal access to work

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<sup>1</sup> The term "worker" is used to avoid serious ethical issues. 'Workers' rather than 'staff' encompass all categories of the workforce irrespective of administrative classification - permanent staff, temporary staff, visiting scientists, consultants, scholars, nationally recruited staff, and daily paid labor.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from 1. the United Nations HIV/AIDS Policies, 2. African Network on Ethics, Law & HIV, Dakar declaration. 3. The International Labor Organization, and 4. G&DP survey under the CGIAR SWI-HA project.

and institutions' facilities and services, right to counseling, care and treatment, justice and equality.

- **Prohibition of mandatory HIV testing:** HIV testing without consent is prohibited. HIV testing would also not be a pre-requisite for access to work, services and facilities of the institution.
- **Sensitivity in language:** Language should uphold human dignity, reflect inclusion, be gender sensitive, accurate and understandable.
- **Ethics in research:** The interests of the research subjects or communities would be paramount. Impact mitigation research would be based on free and informed consent, be non-obtrusive and non-coercive, and the results should be made available to the community for timely and appropriate action.
- **Empowerment:** The empowerment of every person, but particularly women, the poor, the uneducated and children, is essential and must guide all action. Empowerment requires recognition of the right to knowledge, information and technology, freedom of choice and economic opportunity through our research output.
- **Confidentiality:** AfricaRice recognizes the sensitive issues that surround HIV/AIDS and undertakes to handle matters in a discreet and private manner. Where a worker with HIV/AIDS has revealed his/her status to management, AfricaRice will keep the identity of such person confidential.

#### **IV. Language Sensitivity Policy**

AfricaRice management submits that HIV/AIDS is a sensitive issue in Africa, thus in the process of our research, the use of language must be sensitive, appropriate, and must respect the dignity and rights of all concerned, avoids contributing to the stigmatization and rejection of the affected.

**Language should be value neutral, gender sensitive and should be empowering rather than disempowering.** Terms such as "living with HIV" recognize that an infected person may continue to live well and productively for many years. Terms such as "victim" or "sufferer" suggest powerlessness.

**Language should be inclusive and not create and reinforce a Them/Us mentality or approach.** For example, care should be taken with the use of the pronouns "they", "you", "them", etc. Similarly, a term like "intervention" places the speaker outside of the people for or with whom s/he is working.

**Terms used need to be strictly accurate.** For example, "HIV infection", "HIV epidemic", "HIV-related illnesses or conditions", etc. "Situation of risk" is used rather than "risk behavior" or "risk groups".

**Descriptive terms used should be those preferred or chosen by persons described.**

For example, "sex workers" is often the term preferred by those concerned rather than "prostitutes"; "people living with HIV" or "people living with AIDS" are preferred by infected persons rather than "victims".

**Vocabulary should connote peace and human development.** For example, synonyms should be found for words like "campaign", "control", "surveillance", etc.

Personnel Policy

## **V. Personnel Policy**

### **1. Promoting a Safe Work Environment**

AfricaRice management strives to provide a work environment that protects its staff health and safety. Employees are less likely to react inappropriately to a co-worker's illness when they know the facts about HIV infection and AIDS. Therefore, AfricaRice stations are expected to manage the risk of HIV infection in the workplace through protective measures for AfricaRice workforce.

### **2. Protective Measures for AfricaRice Workforce<sup>3</sup>**

#### **❖ Access to information and education**

- The Health and Safety Committee in collaboration with the health service of AfricaRice should build up strategies to inform and educate workers about HIV/AIDS
- AfricaRice workforce and their families should be provided with sufficient, updated information about HIV/AIDS to enable them to protect themselves and others against HIV infection and to cope with the presence of AIDS.
- Training for key staff including managers, supervisors and HR Officers should be organized to communicate and ensure compliance with AfricaRice's HIV/AIDS workplace policy and related programs and benefits.
- AfricaRice shall provide support to training for trainers (both male and female), social peer educators, and occupational safety and health officers.
- Access to relevant information on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment through print, video and computer-based communication strategies.
- For AfricaRice out-posted Staff, AfricaRice will identify and liaise with relevant authorities for the same.

#### **❖ Access to and use of disposable appropriate equipment and materials**

- The AfricaRice health service at all locations should continue to use disposable appropriate equipment and materials in drug administration, and these must be disposed, where it is not reachable by dwellers in the neighboring areas.
- Staff on duty travel to areas where there is no guarantee of the proper sterilization, may request disposable syringes and needles from the health services unit. HRO would provide a certificate in English and French languages explaining the reasons why they are being carried.
- Duty stations that are not equipped with internal health services should contact accredited Public/private health clinics or medical center of their hosting organizations,
- All AfricaRice workers should have access to condoms, and access must be free, simple and discreet.

#### **❖ Voluntary Testing, Counseling and Confidentiality**

- Testing for HIV/AIDS is not required by management. Management will also not solicit information whether such test has been conducted. Staff who wishes to test should do so directly with their physicians/health administrator(s), who would also provide pre-and post-test counseling and confidentiality.
- AfricaRice may also facilitate access to voluntary confidential testing with counselling for all workers by identifying accredited public/private health providers where test can be obtained.

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1.

- Cost associated with such tests should be borne by medical insurance provided by the Institution
- Only the person tested has the right to release information concerning his/her HIV status.

❖ **Recruitment of new staff/contract and continuity of employment**

- There will be no pre-employment screening of candidates for HIV/AIDS. If a person is too unwell to work, s/he is too unwell to be hired, regardless of the cause. Screening for HIV/AIDS is unethical.
- Nothing in the pre-employment examination should be considered as obliging any candidate to declare his or her HIV status.
- HIV/AIDS infection should not, of itself, be considered as a basis for termination of employment.
- If fitness to work is impaired by illness, reasonable alternative work arrangements should be made by the unit-head of the person affected.
- All members of the AfricaRice workforce should enjoy health and social protection irrespective of the type of illness they are affected by.
  - a) HIV/AIDS screening, whether direct (HIV testing) or indirect (assessment of risk behaviors or asking questions about tests already taken), should not be required.
  - b) Confidentiality regarding all medical information, including HIV/AIDS status, must be maintained.
  - c) There should be no obligation on the part of the employee to inform the employer regarding his or her HIV/AIDS status.
  - d) Persons in the workplace affected by or perceived to be affected by HIV/AIDS must be protected from stigmatization and discrimination by co-workers, unions, employers or clients.
  - e) HIV/AIDS affected employees should not be discriminated against, including access to and receipt of any benefits due from occupational related schemes.

The administrative, personnel and financial implications of these principles under terms of appointment and service should be monitored and periodically reviewed.

❖ **Health Insurance Benefits**

- Health insurance coverage would be available for all AfricaRice employees that are entitled to them, regardless of HIV/AIDS status.
- Health insurance premiums for AfricaRice employees should not be affected by their HIV/AIDS status.
- No testing for HIV infection should be permitted with respect to any health insurance scheme.