

# More than just good business

## Employee Wellbeing Programmes in Ghana

The Employee Wellbeing Programme (EWP) initiative in Ghana is an innovative example of applying holistic approaches to workplace health in developing countries. It challenges employers and governments to foster healthy lifestyle changes among employees, their families and the nearby community, in addition to more traditional occupational health and safety concerns.

Instead of focusing on economically disadvantaged or especially vulnerable populations, the approach concentrates on people who have a job and a regular income (who are among those most affected by many non-communicable diseases), and creates partnerships with employers of significant size and level of technological and administrative advancement. The partner organizations tend to be forward-looking, interested in effective use of their resources, and can act as role models for other organizations. The programme thus has a systemic impact by raising health care standards and injecting greater resources into national health and social protection systems.

### Infectious and chronic diseases: a heavy burden on employers and staff

Infectious and chronic diseases pose serious challenges to Ghana's healthcare system and economy. In both the private and public sectors, they increase employee costs and reduce productivity. A recent study suggests that half of productivity losses due to death or illness in Ghana are due to five conditions (see Table 1. overleaf). All of these conditions are preventable or manageable.

In addition to the relatively visible burden on employers constituted by absenteeism (time lost while people go to hospital or stay home because they are ill) there is a less easily measured

### German Health Practice Collection Showcasing health and social protection for development

This Collection describes programmes supported by German Development Cooperation assessed as 'promising or good practice' by experts from German development organizations and two international peer reviewers with expertise in the particular field. Each report tells the story, in plain language, of a particular programme and is published in a short (four pages) and a full version at our web site:  
[www.german-practice-collection.org](http://www.german-practice-collection.org).

cost associated with 'presenteeism' (when a person who chooses to come to work or remain there even though they are ill and therefore unproductive). A staff member's on-the-job performance may also be affected significantly but less visibly by poor financial management when this results in over-indebtedness and domestic stress.

### The Employee Wellbeing approach

In 2006, the former Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH (now GIZ<sup>1</sup>) began – on behalf of Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) – collaborating with the Ministry of Health and the Ghana AIDS Commission to help implement HIV mainstreaming activities such as Workplace Programmes (WPPs) within both the public and private sectors. The programmes aimed to sensitize significant numbers of employees about HIV, encouraging behavioural change, and expanding access to voluntary testing and counselling. Persons testing positive initially are referred



>> Under the Employee Wellbeing Programme, companies offer comprehensive health screenings directly at the workplace.

<sup>1</sup>The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH was formed on 1 January 2011. It brings together the long-standing expertise of DED, GTZ and InWEnt. For further information, go to [www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de).

to an appropriate health institution for a confirmatory test and further treatment if required.

In 2010, what is now GIZ and its partners began to implement an expanded model of comprehensive HIV prevention under the title of Employee Wellbeing. In addition to a broad conception of health and safety at work, the model aims to strengthen relevant national systems that deliver health, social protection and environmental management.

The essential features are:

- **Preventive health packages**, with periodic comprehensive health screenings that include physical examinations, testing for a number of diseases, and vaccinations;
- **Social protection and financial counselling**, which can include helping staff members to access retirement schemes, insurances (life, accident, property), and debt counselling;
- **Health insurance and treatment for staff members**, their families and immediate communities. Some companies directly support clinics or other treatment facilities for staff members and their families (normally this includes up to four children);
- **Confidentiality and non-discrimination**, which means participation in all health screenings is voluntary, and no employee is required to inform the employer about his or her HIV status.

Employee Wellbeing Programmes are implemented with a number of partners in both the public and private sectors.

### Ghana Revenue Authority and GCNet

The Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) is responsible for all aspects of tax and customs duties in Ghana, and employs over 7,000 people around the country. It works with the Ghana Community Network Service Ltd. (GCNet), a private company that provides computerized systems linking the country's trade operators, revenue agencies and regulatory bodies.

Initiated in 2010, the GRA/GCNet EWP is guided by a national Working Group that includes permanent staff from both partners along with representatives of the Ministry of Health, National AIDS Control Programme and National Tuberculosis Programme. GIZ provided an international public health expert to work fulltime within GRA as programme coordinator.

Table 1. Top five causes of productivity losses

Ranking	Top five conditions	Percentage of loss
1	Malaria	24.9
2	Hypertension	12.4
3	HIV/AIDS	7.3
4	Skin diseases	5.9
5	Obesity	5.7
	<b>Five factors as % of total productivity loss</b>	<b>56.2</b>

Source: Hanlon et al., 2011. Figures have been rounded up.

Responsibilities are clearly spelled out in a collectively agreed policy document that declares the overall aim to be 'improved access to education, prevention, treatment and care facilities that are related to infectious and non-communicable diseases.' Medical interventions are provided to staff and their core families 'at the nearest public or private health service provider, as decided by management.' Staff are entitled to 'top-ups' for the National Health Insurance Scheme, giving staff access to medical services and medicines not offered under the basic package.

For example, eight GRA employees currently receive kidney dialysis – an expensive procedure for any health system – under such a top-up arrangement. Designated staff members, EWP Focal Persons, and peer educators are trained in helping employees to access health services.

The EWP's financial wellness component is delivered in a variety of ways, including group lectures, presentations at Wellbeing Fairs, and one-on-one counselling by coordinators. A GRA focal point comments that 'One clear measure of the impact we are having is that savings held by staff in the Credit Union have quadrupled over two years, since the EWP formally began.'

### The Strategic Employee Wellbeing Programme Alliance

In October 2010, a group of major companies operating in Ghana signed an agreement to cooperate in implementing EWPs in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The Strategic Employee Wellbeing Programme Alliance aims to leverage the various companies' expertise, provide a forum for exchanging experiences and practices, and use workplaces to reach out to the informal sector and more vulnerable parts of the society (e.g. families and communities).



>> Drama for development techniques are used to educate the public at a UT financial literacy clinic at a public market.

The Alliance includes the following partner companies:

- Accra Brewery Ltd., a subsidiary of the multinational SABMiller, and a major supplier of beer and bottled water products within Ghana;
- Blue Skies Holdings Ltd., which processes fruit products for export and also produces fruit drinks for the local market;
- Ghana Urban Water Ltd., a state-owned company that manages water supply and sewage systems in urban centres across the country;
- Golden Star (Wassa) Ltd., a gold mining company currently operating two mines and three processing plants in Ghana;
- Japan Motors Trading Company Ltd., a family owned company whose business activities include auto sales, servicing and spare parts, as well as real estate and construction services;
- Newmont Ghana Gold Ltd., a subsidiary of a US-based mining multinational;
- Superlock Technologies Ghana, a high technology company specializing in information and communications technology and security systems;
- UT Group Ltd., a financial services company which includes banking, real estate and trading and logistics among its activities.

The participants all have high profiles in their respective sectors, with economic and social impact well beyond their actual staff levels. Some have many suppliers and sub-contractors, and several 'anchor' local economies in the communities where their principle operations are carried out. All activities are harmonized with relevant organizations such as the National AIDS Control Programme, National Malaria Control Programme, and National Tuberculosis Programme.

► For a short film and the full-length report about this approach go to [www.german-practice-collection.org](http://www.german-practice-collection.org).

The EWPs are integrated in the companies' corporate social responsibility programmes, such as the UT Group's 'financial literacy clinics' in popular marketplaces. In addition to instructional drama and talks about responsible borrowing and savings, the clinics provide free screenings and counselling by GHS nurses, often screening up to 200 people in a day (see photos previous page).

The Alliance has recently begun to support a GIZ-led initiative to bring health services to the population of the notorious Agbogbloshie electronic-waste dump in Accra. In late 2011, following extensive outreach work, GIZ conducted tests among a sample of people that included the normal EWP screenings, but also included additional collection of blood samples which are being analysed for toxins at the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine in Hamburg. The next phase will depend on the results of the toxins analysis.

## Results and achievements

The Strategic Alliance can point to a number of achievements to date:

### Acceptance of the EWP concept.

The concept has not only been gaining acceptance among the staff of different partners, but there is evidence that 'word is getting around' among other employers in Ghana. The Alliance is a particular advance for Ghana's private sector, providing a powerful demonstration of structured engagement by forward-looking, successful enterprises in both employee health and corporate social responsibility.

### Creation of tools and policies.

All partners have now adopted Employee Wellbeing Policies which outline the principles and activities involved in their individual EWPs. A number of technical tools have also been created for activities such as cost-benefit analysis and monitoring and evaluation.

### A wealth of information.

A database of socio-demographic, behavioural and bio-medical data has been collected for more than 174,468 persons since 2006. This is a valuable information asset for Ghana as the Ministry of Health strives to improve health service delivery, disease and risk factors surveillance, health policy decisions and resource.



Photo: © Andrew Wilson



Photo: © GIZ Ghana

>> L. to r. Market workers and members of the public are invited for free health screening.

>> A young man gathers computer components at the Agbogbloshie 'e-waste' dump.

## Lessons learnt

The main lessons learnt in the course of the Employee Wellness Programmes include:

### Invest sufficient human and financial resources.

Several of the managers and implementing staff noted that, if they had to do it all over again, they would have made EWP focal points fulltime positions, freeing these staff from their other responsibilities.

### Mainstream the programme in the corporate structure.

To ensure that EWP makes the transition from an externally funded project into the normal operations of a company or institution, a corporate 'home' (most commonly Human Resources) and dedicated budget must be found.

### Make the business case.

In all participating organizations, the business case had to be made that the EWP would bring concrete benefits to the company.

### Employ a partnership approach.

Participants commented that GIZ's collaborative and problem-solving approach has been an added incentive for busy people with many other responsibilities to contribute their time, experience and creativity to the programme.

## The way forward

Based on the promising results registered by these EWPs, a proposal for West Africa has been submitted to BMZ to extend the approach to neighbouring states. The initiative will be carried out as an example of 'South-South Cooperation' with member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

A related initiative is the extension of the EWP approach to include Disaster Preparedness. Potential interventions include: increasing awareness on pandemics and disasters, creation of pandemic preparedness and response plans for public and private sectors, and development of business continuity plans and risk communication tools.

## Peer Review

The German Health Practice Collection has established criteria, the majority of which programmes and projects must meet, to qualify for publication as part of this series.

The two expert reviewers concluded that the approach is a worthy example of current practice in occupational health and employee wellbeing, with one review stating that the Ghana EWP approach 'reflects the state of the art debates in modern health management and human resources management.'

Both felt that there was not enough data presented to make conclusions about **effectiveness and cost-effectiveness**. However, that the approach was judged **transferable** on the basis that EWPs have been successfully established in a variety of settings and industries. Both reviewers noted evidence of the **participatory** nature of the EWPs, particularly the use of awareness raising and information sharing, and the voluntary nature of the programming were remarked upon. While the reviewers both stated that approach did not appear to have a specific **gender** component, one remarked that women were implicitly 'the conductor of health messages and that they are often targeted through extramural events.'

The quality of **monitoring and evaluation** was described as 'solid,' with one reviewer suggesting that it would be valuable to extending the data collected to include mental health. Both reviewers agreed that while none of the individual components of the approach were new, the overall approach to delivery and outreach of services was **innovative**.

One described the inclusion of health issues on companies' and policy makers' agendas through high-level involvement of the Occupational Health Unit of the Ghana Health Service as 'a great step forward.' Finally, the reviewers concurred that the approach's **sustainability** was likely to be high because of its mainstreaming within and funding from the various partners' corporate structures (rather than treating EWP as an externally-driven project with a limited lifetime). One expressed confidence that 'in the long run, growing health and prosperity will show the positive impact of the EWP.'

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