HIV/AIDS: Shell moves to check scourge in Niger Delta
by George Onah from vanguardngr.com

Port Harcourt, Nigeria, 2 April 2009 — Alarmed by the rising rate of HIV/AIDS in rural and urban Niger Delta, Shell Petroleum Development Company has introduced campaigns, using films, drama, lectures and community talks to check the scourge.

Carried out under the auspices of the Gbaran Ubie Oil and Gas project, Bayelsa State, the company said it has over 6,000 workers (who are mobile men with money), working in 96 communities, with a population of at least 160,000.

In an interactive session with the media in Port Harcourt yesterday, Manager, Regional Community Health, Dr. Tunde Fakunle, said out of the 20 million population of the South-South region, about 1.2 million people were infected with the virus.

Fakunle said the spread of the disease was capable of causing a decline in productivity, hence the need to “promote comprehensive prevention, increase access to quality care and treatment as well as combat stigmatization and discrimination.”

“AIDS in the community and country leads to increased costs of production, declining productivity and declining profits. We don't want HIV/AIDS to kill our business, ravage our community and people.

“Again if the scourge is not properly checked, oil and gas boom may spell the HIV/AIDS doom. As a result, we want to minimize economic impact of the scourge because the disease is more than a health problem,” Fakunle said.

In retrospect, he said about 33.2 million people were living with the disease across the world, adding that 90 per cent of the figure was in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 4.4 percent of Nigeria’s population living with HIV/AIDS.

According to him, Nigeria is second to South Africa in terms of the infection of the scourge.

To access the article online, go to http://allafrica.com/stories/200904010879.html.

Kenya's Transport Industry, World Food Program Launch HIV/AIDS Service Centers Along Transport Routes from kaisernetwork.org

Officials in the transport industry in Kenya have partnered with the World Food Program to open HIV/AIDS service centers along major transportation routes that will offer testing and care to transport workers, port workers and commercial sex workers, Kenya's Business Daily reports. WFP, the Kenya Ports Authority, Port Management Association of Eastern and Southern Africa, and the North Star Foundation established the first center along the corridor route at Mombasa port. An additional 20 centers have been established.

The project follows recent studies funded by the International Maritime Organization that examined HIV/AIDS prevalence in the ports of Mombasa, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, and Maputo, Mozambique. The first two studies released last year found that truck drivers are at an increased risk of HIV/AIDS. According to WFP Country Director Burkard Oberle, the research found that HIV/AIDS prevalence in the transport industry is double the national average of 7.4%.

The research also found that 60% of truck drivers have an average of three sex partners and that more than 80% of truck drivers are married, increasing the risk for HIV among their wives. The study also looked at the proximity of voluntary counseling and testing centers to the more than 6,000 truck drivers who park in remote areas on a nightly basis and found that 28% of drivers were near a VCT center.

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In addition, Esther Getabu, a provincial director for the Ministry of Transport, said that poverty along major transport routes has led to more sex workers, which is increasing the spread of HIV.

The project developed out of the need "to bring the port and corridor stakeholders in the transport industry together to address the spread of HIV/AIDS by providing collaboration with key development partners," according to Jerome Ntibarekerwa, PMAESA secretary-general. Oberle added that three roadside centers are planned for this year to "offer people services that would otherwise be difficult for them to access on the road." According to Oberle, the program employs the largest number of local truck drivers. He said, "Without these drivers, we would not be able to do our life changing work, and we want to make sure that our drivers have access to vital services." According to Business Daily, similar prevention projects in the transport industry will be launched in other PMAESA member countries.

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