Increasing Access to HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care for Vulnerable People

**PROJECT INFORMATION**

**Area:** Health and Poverty Reduction  
**Budget:** US$ 3,374,334  
**Duration:** September 2013–December 2017  
**Implementing Partner(s):** Department of AIDS Control, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India  
**Other Partner(s):** Swasti, Bengaluru; Infosem, India Network for Sexual Minorities; Centre for Legal Aid and Rights, New Delhi  
**Location(s):** National-level

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**Background**

India has an estimated 2.1 million people living with HIV. The adult HIV prevalence at the national level has continued its steady decline from an estimated peak of 0.38% in 2001–03 through 0.34% in 2007 and 0.28% in 2012 to 0.26% in 2015.

While nationally there has been a consistent decline in new infections over the last ten years, new infections have increased in states that have typically been associated with low prevalence. Infection rates have increased in specific groups such as people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men (MSM), and transgenders (TG).

Despite large-scale advocacy and awareness-generation activities, adults and children infected or affected by HIV continue to be subjected to human rights violations. The challenge is further compounded by the uneven delivery of stigma-free access to services for prevention and care, entitlements, and social protection at the community level.
About the project

The project, in partnership with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, aims to reduce stigma faced by people affected by HIV by supporting community action, addressing the need to reform laws that impede effective HIV response, and improving access to entitlements and services, including sustained access to medicines. The project provides technical assistance and policy development support to NACO and its district offices on facilitating access to social protection. Expansion of coverage of HIV-related services to hard-to-reach groups such as MSM and TG is also one of the focus areas under the project. The project closely works with NACO to analyse existing policies related to people affected by HIV and address the same in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

Developments so far

I: Policy development
- Supported policy development on mainstreaming HIV concerns in the broader development agenda, expanding social protection, addressing the risks of migration, strengthening rural outreach (link worker scheme), encouraging greater voice for sexual minorities, and ensuring greater involvement of positive people in policies

II: Institutional strengthening
- Strengthened in-house capacity of NACO by providing technical and human resource support to the Mainstreaming Unit at NACO. The Mainstreaming Unit provides strategic oversight and policy development support at the central level and to State AIDS Control Societies

III: Mainstreaming and social protection
- Supported the formulation of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) entered into by 14 non-health ministries for a multisectoral response to HIV, the specific objective of this partnership being to strengthen prevention efforts, improve access to testing and treatment, increase uptake of benefits under social protection and reduce stigma against people infected and affected with HIV
- Demonstrated state-level models to increase access of HIV-affected communities to social protection; Project Utkarsh, implemented through Swasti in Bengaluru, supported 29 functional social protection help desks
- Single window model for delivery of social protection benefits to HIV-affected persons has since been scaled up by NACO in 189 districts and 1.04 million social protection benefits and entitlements have been availed of by HIV-affected communities
- Supported the development of a web based portal on social protection containing 135 HIV inclusive and exclusive schemes for ease of delivery of social protection. The portal was officially launched by the Hon’ble Minister for Health & Family Welfare on the World AIDS Day in December 2015
- Supported the development of operational guidelines for the District AIDS Prevention and Control Unit for roll out of single window access to social protection for people affected by HIV
- Documented nine case studies across Odisha, Karnataka, and Rajasthan that highlighted the improved quality of life of people from affected communities due to access of social and legal protection

IV: Stigma and discrimination
- Prepared HIV stigma-reduction framework for integration into National AIDS Control Programme – Phase IV
- Conducted a National Survey on the Levels of HIV-related Stigma and Discrimination in Urban India in partnership with NACO
- Developed a research compendium, HIV-related Stigma Research in India: Current Knowledge, Gaps, and Recommendations that serves as an evidence-base to inform effective national response
- Prepared a scan of laws that enable and those that impede effective delivery of HIV services in the country
V: Capacity building of marginalized and HIV-affected communities

- Commissioned a publication that documents the journey over three decades of the coming together of MSM and TG communities as a collective to fight for their rights. The book entitled A People Stronger: The Collectivization of MSM and TG Groups in India was published by SAGE Publications.

- Supported project Umeed Live in Chhattisgarh to strengthen the capacities of transgender people to advocate for their rights and development needs.

- Contributed for the establishment of five Transgender Welfare Boards in states by facilitating the engagement of the community with the decision-makers at the state level.

- Supported organizational development of multiple national networks of people living with HIV and sexual minorities.

- Advocated and supported the institutionalization of a separate Technical Resource Group for the Transgender and Men who have sex with Men at NACO.

- Published a document entitled From the Frontline of Community Action: A Compendium of Six Successful Community-based HIV Interventions That Have Worked for MSM–TG–Hijras in India that details the key interventions, partnerships, lessons learnt and replicable models.

VI: Expanding coverage of HIV services to hard-to-reach groups such as MSM and TG

- Completed nation-wide mapping of TG communities and developed operational guidelines to scale up targeted interventions for MSM and TG persons.

- Project Sashakt reached out to 4,500 MSM and TG persons through six community-based organizations in India.

- Seven training modules were developed for service providers of various cadres to increase the delivery of HIV healthcare services to sexual minorities covered by the Targeted Intervention Programme under NACO.

Looking to the future

- Increasing convergence of HIV with other areas of priority by formalizing partnerships with non-health ministries under the Government of India.

- To contain the HIV epidemic, expanding coverage of HIV services to ensure easy access to marginalized sexual minorities and those most at risk.

- Establishing a rigorous monitoring and reporting system to effectively and efficiently track the access to social protection entitlements and schemes at the state level.

- Continue with the advocacy engagement for establishment of special institutional mechanisms to adequately address the rights for sexual minorities.

- Continue to engage in field research to gather empirical data about social protection and mainstreaming to support evidence-informed programming of NACO.

- Address the need to reform laws that impede effective HIV response and continue working on the mandate of reducing stigma and discrimination against sexual minorities.

Last updated: June 2016