



2010

Report: World AIDS Day Seminar 2010, Talagang



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Society for Sustainable Development

12/22/2010



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BACKGROUND

Started on 1st December 1988, World AIDS Day is an event celebrated internationally across the globe. World AIDS Day or WAD as is sometimes written for brevity is about raising money, increasing awareness, fighting prejudice and improving education. Every year the theme is different and focuses on some aspects of HIV and AIDS response in the world. The World AIDS Day theme for 2010 is '*Universal Access and Human Rights*'. World AIDS Day is important for reminding people that HIV has not gone away, and that there are many things still to be done.

According to UNAIDS estimates, there are now 33.3 million people living with HIV, including 2.5 million children. During 2009 some 2.6 million people became newly infected with the virus and an estimated 1.8 million people died from AIDS. Pakistan is one of the countries where the HIV epidemic has reached the concentrated epidemic stage where the prevalence in some population groups is above 5%.

The vast majority of people with HIV and AIDS live in lower- and middle-income countries. But HIV today is a threat to men, women and children on all continents around the world. The global HIV pandemic is one of the defining issues of our time. It is a long-standing challenge that has spread throughout the world, evolved in ways that are often very hard to predict and thus far has claimed 25 million lives. HIV and its impacts affect everyone. HIV tends to deepen existing social inequities that already exist within societies across the world, inequalities such as poverty, gender inequality, and other social and economic exclusion. The result is that groups of people are more likely to be exposed to HIV and its impacts than others. HIV is more common in groups who face discrimination and criminalization, namely people who use drugs, men who have sex with men and sex workers. They face issues of human rights violations as well as the issues to access to basic health services information and means to protect themselves against HIV.



UNFPA MANDATE

As part of its overall UNFPA works to intensify and scale up HIV prevention efforts using rights-based and evidence-informed strategies, including attention to the gender inequalities that add fuel to the epidemic. It also reaches out to other vulnerable populations. Linking HIV responses with sexual and reproductive health care is the overarching strategy for reaching more people cost-effectively and moving towards the goal of universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support.

UNFPA Chakwal has been actively promoting the cause of effective response to HIV and AIDS through supporting various initiatives in public and private sectors. Where on one hand it supports integration of HIV and AIDS into SRH and MNCH programming, on the other hand it supports civil society organizations to carry out interventions for creating awareness among different groups of community regarding vulnerability to HIV, respect for human rights and fighting stigma and discrimination.

INTRODUCTION OF SOCIETY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Society for Sustainable Development is a civil society organization working for the protection, respect and fulfillment of human rights of all the sections of society. SSD has countrywide linkages and partnerships. SSD is committed to work for the uplift and development of disadvantaged, marginalized, vulnerable and disempowered communities. SSD believes that community involvement, participation and ownership is the cornerstone of sustainable development. The key strategic areas of SSD include: Poverty Reduction, Increase awareness and access regarding MNCH services, Increase awareness and build capacity regarding basic human rights and rights based approaches, Prevention and Control of communicable diseases including HIV, TB and malaria, Building Capacity of civil society organizations in best practice, Participatory Policy and Advocacy.

Every year SSD celebrates World AIDS to express its commitment with cause of HIV prevention and control in Pakistan. SSD believes that Pakistan has a small window of opportunity for



control of HIV and if we act swiftly and in a very focused manner, the epidemic can easily be controlled in Pakistan.

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY

WAD events are usually celebrated in big cities and small cities where people are more vulnerable and lack basic information about means of protecting themselves from HIV are often neglected. Society for Sustainable Development requested UNFPA Chkawal Office to provide support for organizing this event in Chakwal to make the event more effective and meaningful. District Chakwal has strong presence of many the vulnerable groups like coal mines, migrant workers, cement factories and school and colleges in district Chakwal. Considering these factors UNFPA decided to provide support for organizing the activity for all these groups and stakeholders to comprehend the basic facts about the cause, and to build the capacity of other civil society organization of the district so that more organized, better and effective efforts can be made to counter the diseases and to protect the rights of these vulnerable groups.

ACTIVITY GOAL

“Improving existing knowledge and raising awareness about HIV and AIDS in general public, Community Leaders and Civil Society Organization working in district Chakwal through addressing the issues of people living with HIV and AIDS on World AIDS Day 2010”.

OBJECTIVES

- To share Expert opinion with Civil Society Organization of Chakwal to raise voice for the cause.
- To sensitize general community, policy makers and NGO workers young girls and women about the issues concerning HIV and AIDS and stigma and discrimination.
- To provide an opportunity to people living with HIV/AIDS to come forward and openly express their feelings/concerns/experiences and needs.



PROCEEDING REPORT

The event was attended by a huge number of participants hailing from different walks of life. The participants included Students, representatives of civil society organizations, government representatives, health department officials, journalists and city notables. EDO Health District Chakwal Dr. Nasir Mehmmod Khan was the chief guest of the event.

The proceedings started with the recitation of the Holy Quran by Hafiz Jhanzib Ahmad. District Program Officer UNFPA, Dr. Arifa Alvi welcomed the participants and discussed the objectives of the activity in detail. She also threw light on the mandate and activities of UNFPA in Chakwal district. She said that Rights Based Approach was the cornerstone of all UNFPA interventions. She emphasized that respect for human rights could play an important role in prevention and control of HIV and AIDS as most of the groups vulnerable to HIV and AIDS suffered human rights violations. Integration of HIV and SRH services was another key strategy adopted by UNFPA to control the spread of HIV. She informed the audience about the extensive support being provided by UNFPA to MNCH program and department of Health. She said that HIV orientation and basic training was integral part of all training workshops organized by UNFPA for different health department workers and officials. Talking about HIV situation in Pakistan, she said that the estimate of HIV positive people in Pakistan was around 100,000, which though not very alarming figure was still very high and civil society organizations, international agencies and public sector needed to work in collaboration to prevent its further spread. She emphasized that women were equally vulnerable to HIV and their percentage among the HIV positive people in Pakistan was alarmingly high. She once again emphasized the importance of human rights and universal access to control HIV. She thanked all the participants and specially EDO Health Dr. Nasir for his participation.





Mr. Abid Atiq is a well known expert in the field of HIV and AIDS in Pakistan. He works for an international organization Interact Worldwide. He was invited to discuss history of HIV



epidemic in Pakistan and its current situation and dynamics. While discussing he said that throughout the world HIV epidemic has followed a certain pattern and the in Pakistan the pattern is the same. HIV epidemic starts in certain vulnerable communities like FSWs, MSM and IDUs and then it spreads in general public and the same is happening in Pakistan. He said that if want to

control the spread of HIV and AIDS, we should be ready to talk about certain issues which are some times considered taboo in our society. Emphasizing his point, he said that 80 % HIV infections were through unsafe sexual encounters, therefore we need to focus on this aspect and promote safer sexual practices. Mr. Zubair Kayani who is religious scholar also emphasized the importance of the role which religious leaders can play in creating awareness about HIV and AIDS

National Manager SSD, Aftab Ahmed Awan talked about the linkage HIV and human rights. HIV and human rights are linked in two ways. Groups like FSWs, MSM and IDUs are most vulnerable to HIV. But these groups face of lot of stigma, discriminations and human rights violations. These violations create hindrance for these groups in accessing basic facilities like education, health and information which increases their vulnerability further. Second type of violation occur when HIV positive people are discriminated against by society in





general and health service providers in particular. We are all entitled to certain rights just by the virtue of being human beings and whatever our status may be, we can not be denied these rights.

A small theater performance by the group ‘True Theater’ was a prominent feature of the event. The group enthralled the public by its performance which revolved around the issues of stigma, discrimination and lack of awareness. They conveyed their message in artistic way and were hugely appreciated by the public.



Dr. Nasir Mehmood, EDO (Health) Chakwal, in his closing remarks and comments told the audience about the initiatives taken by the government on the policy making level. He also

emphasized the awareness campaigns should be launched by the local media and other civil society organizations in order to eradicate this menace from the society. He also appreciated the initiative taken by UNFPA and SSD in Talagang to celebrate the event regarding world AIDS day. He stressed that Islam provided us with such a complete code of life that we could save ourselves from every harm just by following the teachings of Islam.



In his closing remarks he also applauded the efforts done by UNFPA for supporting SSD to create awareness about AIDS in the general public. He assured civil society organizations of full support from health department in such initiatives.



CONCLUSION

The event proved very successful and was heavily attended. Providing their feedback, the participants expressed their opinion that such events are very important for creating awareness for such delicate issues in the public. They also appreciated the role of UNFPA which it was playing to support civil society organizations and for their strengthening. They hoped that such events will be organized in future as well.