HIV/AIDS thus is a growing concern for AP. The AP State AIDS Control Society (APSACS) is working across the state in controlling the epidemic and caring for the infected. Despite best efforts and scale up of operations, the epidemic continues to grow. There is a need to step up efforts and increase the sense of urgency in addressing the problem. Many development agencies are working flat out to combat HIV/AIDS in the state. One of them is Centre for World Solidarity (CWS). We are currently facilitating various development programmes to empower the vulnerable rural communities, particularly women, dalits (‘untouchables’), tribal people and other minorities, through 300 grassroots NGOs in the states of AP, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu. Our partners at the grassroots are provided with skills, perspective and financial resources to empower the rural communities to assert their socio-economic and political rights.

The organization is driven by the belief that HIV/AIDS – being a development problem and not just a health issue – should not be addressed only by (health) specialists or scientists but should be treated as a cross-cutting issue to be tackled through development programmes. There is an urgent need to start mainstreaming efforts so that the spread of HIV can be curtailed and the associated stigma and discrimination minimized.

Internal and external mainstreaming
With this belief, CWS initiated mainstreaming processes with the support of our board and partners. The process started with an internal mainstreaming effort, comprising orientations on HIV/AIDS for CWS staff, workshops, circulation of materials, development of a workplace policy, and documentation of case studies of PLWHAs from the general population to understand the dimensions related to development and human rights (see the story of Sriramulu on p. 7).

Simultaneously, the external mainstreaming process started through a partnership and collaboration with APSACS. We felt it was important to work with, and stimulate, the government to create an enabling environment for external mainstreaming. APSACS was also keen to collaborate since it believed that CWS would be able to reach out to the general population.

The process began at the end of 2004 when a comprehensive list of questions was sent to partners in AP with the aim of understanding the status of HIV/AIDS. It was clear from the responses that the HIV/AIDS situation was grave and needed to be addressed urgently. With funding through APSACS the following project was implemented:

As a first step, 196 staff (63% women) from 56 grassroots NGOs were trained as master trainers for 19 districts. They are now resource persons at the...
Lessons learned
- It is necessary to sensitize the government and other stakeholders on the need to mainstream HIV/AIDS externally.
- Specific interventions are needed to create community care and support systems through development programmes, particularly at grassroots level.
- It is of great importance to create an infrastructure that concurrently develops health-care networks, education programmes, improvement of the livelihoods base for marginalized people, and community participation.

Apart from strengthening the public health system, specific interventions are needed to create community care and support systems through development programmes, particularly at grassroots level.

Focused interventions are required to address the issues related to migration and poverty.

Some lessons learned from our programmes:
- Continuous and constant efforts are needed to reach out to different stakeholders. Each department or programme of government/non-governmental organizations and private sectors need to mainstream HIV/AIDS concerns and plan accordingly. Collaborations and linkages are necessary between government, civil society organizations, religious groups, political parties, etc.
- Apart from strengthening the public health system, specific interventions are needed to create community care and support systems through development programmes, particularly at grassroots level.

Mainstreaming efforts are gaining momentum in India and CWS is lobbying the state governments for mainstreaming efforts to be initiated by both government and private sectors. The mainstreaming process initiated by CWS and our partners is being reviewed on a monthly basis to assess the impact of HIV/AIDS on the communities and to work out strategies to maximize the interventions towards effective external mainstreaming. However we realize we have taken only a first step and that there is still a long way to go…

New projects
Recently, CWS identified two grassroots NGOs, Society for Women’s Awareness and Rural Development (SWARD) and Modern Architects for Rural India (MARI), in Telangana region of AP. As a pilot, both organizations will support mainstreaming processes in two villages each, in which the focus will be on livelihood support for PLWHA and affected families. Another project focuses on mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS through local organizations in post-Tsunami rehabilitation programmes in the states of Tamil Nadu and AP. These states were devastated by the Tsunami in December 2004. Victims of the Tsunami are vulnerable to diseases, poor nutrition and unhealthy living conditions. Further, the relief and rehabilitation work in Tsunami-hit areas has brought in different people from different cultures, which may aggravate HIV infection. Over one year after the flood, the Tsunami response has now moved from the immediate humanitarian relief response to the developmental phase, which creates new opportunities for mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in existing and new development programmes.

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1. AASHA was the government-initiated month-long intensive campaign in AP to create 100% awareness in the entire state on HIV/AIDS, in July 2005. The campaign was undertaken in collaboration with NGOs, CBOs, media, private sector, local governments, etc.