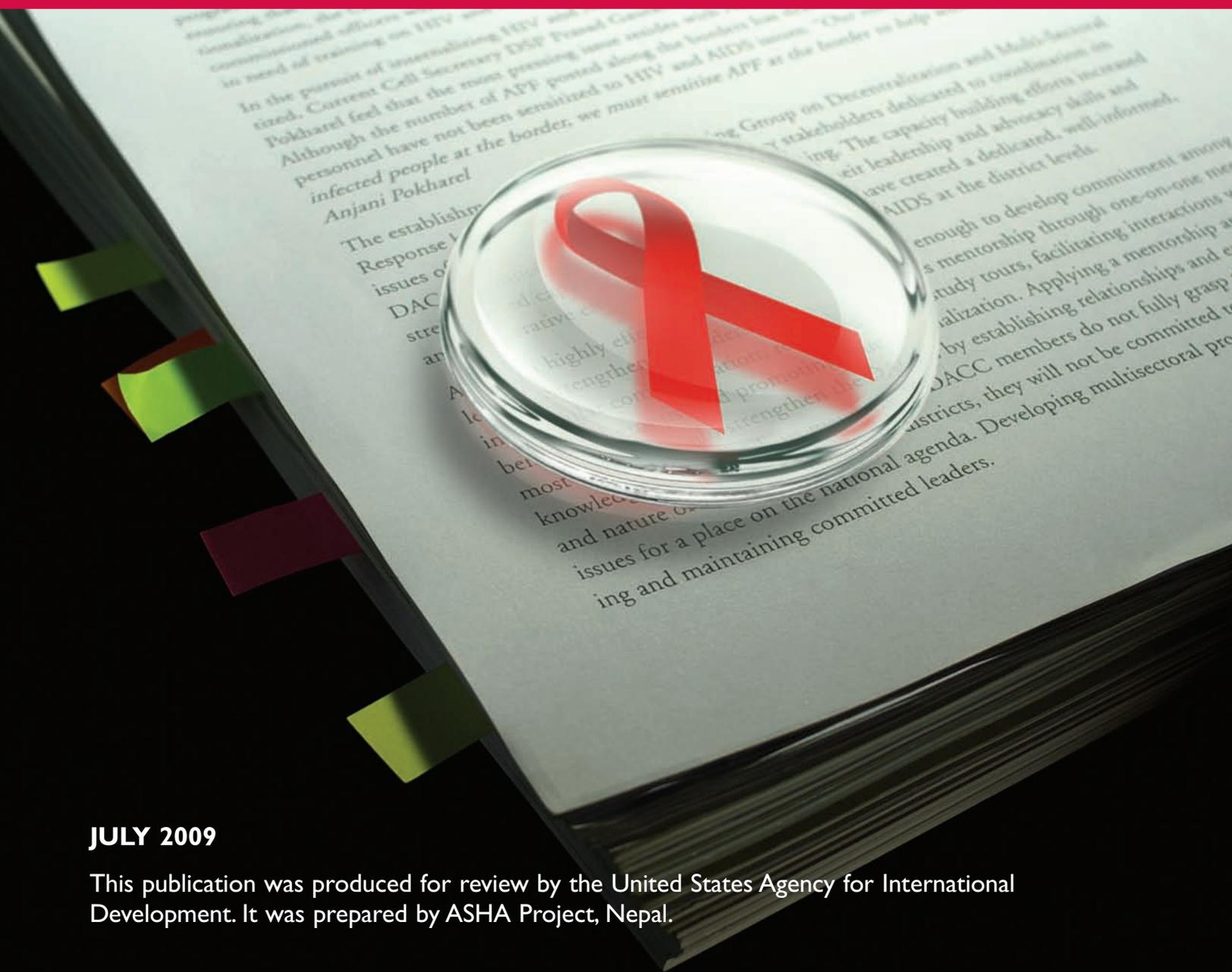




MULTISECTORAL RESPONSE AND POLICY INITIATIVES

END-OF PROJECT REPORT ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FUTURES
GROUP INTERNATIONAL, LLC IN THE USAID/ASHA PROJECT



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DISCLAIMER

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMDA	Association of Medical Doctors of Asia
APF	Armed Police Force
APLF	Asia Pacific Leadership Forum
ASHA	Advancing Surveillance, Policies, Prevention, Care and Support to Fight HIV/AIDS
CBO	Community Based Organization
CMF	Conscious Media Forum
DACC	District AIDS Coordination Committee
DDC	District Development Committee
DSP	Deputy Superintendent of Police
FDU	Female Drug User
FHI	Family Health International
FWLD	Forum for Women, Law and Development
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
HSCB	HIV/AIDS and STI Control Board
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LDTA	Local Development Training Academy
MAN	Management Association of Nepal
MARP	Most At-Risk Population
MOHP	Ministry of Health and Population
NAP+N	National Association of People Living with HIV in Nepal
NCASC	National Centre for AIDS and STD Control
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PLHA	People Living with HIV and AIDS
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
ToT	Training of Trainers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCT	Voluntary Counseling and Testing
VDC	Village Development Committee
WHLA	Women Living with HIV and AIDS

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Nirmal Prasad Pandey Ph.D.

Senior Policy Advisor
Futures Group International, LLC
USAID/ASHA Project
July, 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nepal currently finds itself in a ‘concentrated epidemic’ with approximately 70,000 estimated people living with HIV or AIDS (PLHA). This classification of epidemic indicates a situation where HIV prevalence is occurring in less than 1 percent of the general population, while consistently occurring in more than 5 percent of at least one defined sub-population.

As of May 2009 a total 13,885 HIV cases had been reported in Nepal. The majority of these cases come from the 30-39 age group. The estimated adult prevalence rate in 2008 was 0.49 percent with several sub-populations representing the majority of cases. These sub-populations have been identified as most-at-risk populations (MARPs) and include intravenous drug users (IDUs), female and male sex workers (FSW/MSW), clients of FSWs and MSWs, labor migrants, and men who have sex with men (MSM).

The Government of Nepal has been actively working to mitigate the impacts of this epidemic through the *National HIV & AIDS Strategy* and the *National Action Plan for HIV & AIDS* which is revised and updated every two to three years. National commitment, in collaboration with the work of

international and national organizations, has resulted in activities and interventions that have succeeded in decreasing sero-prevalence, increasing knowledge and raising awareness, improving access to treatment, and risk behavior reduction. However, stigma and discrimination towards PLHA remain a prominent challenge to equity of access to services and basic human rights.

The Advancing Surveillance, Policies, Prevention, Care and Support to Fight HIV/AIDS (ASHA) Project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), was designed to tackle the HIV epidemic from all angles. Forming a consortium of Family Health International (FHI), the Association for Medical Doctors Asia (AMDA) and Futures Group International LLC, this project focused on awareness, prevention, treatment, care and surveillance; improved service delivery; and policy and capacity building from the grassroots to the national level.

To achieve its goals, the Futures Group conducted high-level policy initiatives, including an assessment of operational policy barriers, to promote and encourage cross-sector involvement, foster high-level commitment to the prevention-to-

care program, and reduce HIV-related stigma and discrimination. Expanding on previous work with the HIV/AIDS Bill, the Futures Group provided technical assistance to the Nepal Government, NCASC, and several ministries to finalize the draft Bill and sustain a conducive atmosphere for policy development.

At the district level, the Futures Group strengthened 15 District AIDS Coordination Committees (DACCs) and helped to establish strong local partnerships and coordination. To expand these efforts into all levels of society, the Futures Group worked with uniformed services and local agencies, specifically the Armed Police Force and Local Development Training Academy, to develop an HIV and AIDS training curriculum that was streamlined into their regular training programs. Both organizations have ensured the sustainability of these training curricula, to promote improved knowledge, behaviors, and reduction in stigma and discrimination.

At the local level, the Futures Group assisted civil society and marginalized MARP groups, such as female drug users (FDUs) and women living with HIV and AIDS (WHLA), to increase their capacity for advocacy, dialogue and partici-

pation in policy development. With the establishment of the Federation of Women Living with HIV and AIDS and Dristi Nepal, women from significantly marginalized groups now have a supportive environment to raise their issues and the capacity to join together and have their issues acknowledged in the national agenda.

To ensure that the deeper issues of HIV and AIDS are covered and accessible nationally, the Futures Group organized a media walk in coordination with Conscious Media Forum, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, and Rashtriya Dalit Network Nepal to the five most highly affected districts in the far-west region. As a result of this project, journalists were encouraged and capacitated to analyze and investigate the socio-economic issues associated with HIV and AIDS. This resulted in national attention being brought to the hardships and lives of infected and affected individuals. Consequently, media coverage of HIV and AIDS issues has been consistent, ensuring that the issues remain in the minds of the general public and on the national agenda.

The activities conducted under the ASHA Project have set the groundwork for an environment dedicated

to fighting for, implementing, and sustaining HIV and AIDS-related policies and projects. Continuous efforts and established commitment will ensure that the hard work of ASHA Project and its partners will help to reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS, mitigate the impact on those who are infected and affected, and ensure that their voices are heard and their rights protected.

BACKGROUND

The first case of HIV was reported in Nepal in 1988. Currently, the country finds itself in a ‘concentrated epidemic’ with an estimated 70,000 people living with HIV or AIDS (PLHA). This classification of epidemic indicates a situation where HIV prevalence is occurring in less than 1 percent of the general population, while consistently occurring in over 5 percent of at least one defined sub-population. However, recent statistics indicate that seroprevalence is decreasing.

The Government of Nepal has identified HIV and AIDS as a cross-cutting issue which is affecting national development as indicated by the *National HIV & AIDS Action Strategy*. Under the framework of this Strategy the *National HIV & AIDS Action Plan* has been developed and undergone multi-stakeholder review and revision every two to three years to ensure effective and efficient intervention strategies and to incorporate new ideas and lessons learnt. This Plan is Nepal’s version of the “One Agreed Action Framework on AIDS”, one of the Three Ones Principle, which has been endorsed by the country. The government is committed to the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals endeavoring to halt and reverse the spread of the virus by 2015.

Nepal has demonstrated its commitment to combating the HIV and AIDS epidemic through the establishment of the National HIV/AIDS and STI Control Board in August 2007. This board will function as a semi-autonomous entity mandated to formulate policies, monitor the trend of the epidemic and oversee the country’s multisectoral response to HIV and AIDS.

Although great strides have been made to combat HIV and AIDS, many issues have overshadowed the epidemic as a priority. While it has been 17 years since Nepal became a democracy, it has been barely two since the monarchy was abolished and the Interim Government was established. During this time there has been great political instability. In this context it is very difficult to maintain commitment. In some cases, months of lobbying and advocacy for HIV and AIDS as a priority may become moot due to changing government appointments. This constant shifting of leadership has produced instability and a lack of continuity and commitment among leaders, resulting in barriers to achieving the commitments to HIV and AIDS policy.

In addition to the political turmoil Nepal has faced in past and current years, socio-cultural practices have

also posed a problem for mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS. Many topics remain taboo in this country rich in tradition, including sex outside of marriage, drug use, sex work, and homosexuality. Although these behaviors have been found to have a significant contribution to the spread of HIV and AIDS in Nepal, denial and stigma and discrimination towards individuals with high-risk behaviors keeps them from speaking up and seeking prevention, treatment and care services.

It was in this context that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) brought Family Health International (FHI), Futures Group International, LLC, and the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA) together to form the Advancing Surveillance, Policies, Prevention, Care and Support to Fight HIV/AIDS (ASHA) Project. These three distinguished, well-respected, and experienced organizations formed a consortium to achieve a coordinated multisectoral response to mitigate the HIV and AIDS virus and provide equitable access to prevention, treatment and care.

INTRODUCTION

While the three members of this consortium, FHI, Futures Group, and AMDA, all worked together to achieve ASHA's common goals and objective, each organization had a specific role relevant to its previous work with HIV and AIDS issues in Nepal.

Family Health International (FHI) is an US-based INGO, who has been working on HIV and AIDS in Nepal since 1993. It served as the prime agency to ensure that all aspects of ASHA Project results were achieved and coordinated with USAID, N-MARC, MOHP/NCASC, HSCB, and other donors, in addition to managing team member agencies and implementing partners. With more than 50 implementing agencies, FHI worked to increase outreach to communities, promote access to services and treatment, provide knowledge and education, and introduce new programs for infected and affected individuals.

From July 2006 until June 2009, the Futures Group provided technical assistance to build the capacity of the Government of Nepal and civil society to manage and implement HIV and AIDS activities as well as to inform policy formulation at the national, local and community levels to reduce stigma and discrimination and enable equitable access to services. To achieve these deliverables, the

Futures Group worked on components such as increasing multisectoral political commitments and effective resource allocation, building technical skills of policymakers to support decentralization, strengthening coordination at the district level, mitigating HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and improving the legal and regulatory environment.

The Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA), a Nepali organization, has more than 18 years of HIV and AIDS experience in Nepal. As such, they functioned as the service delivery source. By providing support and coordinating with local hospitals and medical facilities, AMDA provided VCT, STI, care and support services to MARPs and vulnerable groups. They performed the key role of building the capacity of district-level implementing agencies and provided ongoing technical supervision to help build local capacity for STI, VCT, care, support and treatment service delivery.

The common theme through all of these initiatives and actions is promoting collaboration at the national level by working with the Government of Nepal, donor agencies, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and NGOs in planning, implementing and monitoring the national response. To achieve its deliverables, ASHA Project deter-

mined five broad results areas:

- (1)** Reduce HIV transmission through targeted prevention activities among MARPs and vulnerable populations.
- (2)** Strengthen the capacity of Nepal Government and civil society in policy formulation to reduce stigma and discrimination and enable equitable access to services; strengthen capacity of Nepal Government and civil society to plan, manage, and implement effective HIV/AIDS interventions.
- (3)** Build on technical leadership to improve the planning, collection, analysis, and use of strategic information.
- (4)** Increase access to quality care, support, and treatment through public, private, and non-governmental sources for PLHA and their families by strengthening the capacity of national health systems and community-based organizations to provide quality care and treatment services.
- (5)** Create linkages among stakeholders and support national coordination of Nepal's national response with a strong emphasis on phased capacity-building, ongoing provision of technical support and supervision, and active support for the involvement of civil society, PLHA, and MARPs in implementing and managing the national response.

ACHIEVING THE DELIVERABLES

The Futures Group took the lead to realize ASHA Project Results Area 2, building the capacity of Nepal Government and civil society to manage and implement HIV and AIDS activities and to inform policy formulation at the national, local and community levels to reduce stigma and discrimination and enable equitable access to services.

To achieve these deliverables, the Futures Group worked to increase multisectoral political commitment and resource allocation by:

- Strengthening leadership;
- Improving national institutional and coordination mechanisms;
- Assessing operational policy barriers;
- Providing support and training to local organizations for capacity building and advocacy;
- Conducting capacity building within finance and planning using Futures Group's GOALS Model.

STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP

On the national level, the Futures Group worked with various high-level civil servants, bureaucrats, members of the interim Parliament, policy champions, and the Forum for Women, Law and Development

to draft and develop an HIV and AIDS Bill. Although this Bill is still currently awaiting enactment, pressure groups, policy champions, and advocates continue to support and campaign for its ratification.

IMPROVING NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS

To create an enabling environment within all forms of government, the ASHA Project aimed to strengthen coordination at the district level. Facilitated by the Futures Group, the ASHA Project improved the technical skills of policymakers to support decentralization through targeted improvement of district-level planning processes; this included financing, capacity building of policymakers and support to local multisectoral partnership building efforts. Specifically, support was provided to ensure that district-level action plans are developed, costed, implemented, and monitored. To aid in this process, the Futures Group provided training in strategic planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, and advocacy to the District AIDS Coordination Committees (DACCs). As a result, 15 DACCs were strengthened to actively fight HIV and AIDS transmission, stigma and discrimination and to provide access to service, treatment and care.

ASSESSING OPERATIONAL POLICY BARRIERS

A significant barrier to improving policy and gaining multisectoral support is stigma and discrimination towards most at-risk populations and infected and affected individuals. From this, it was determined that multiple stakeholders would be targeted to improve understanding of how HIV-related stigma and discrimination impede access to equity of HIV services. This was achieved through a training session aimed at sensitizing 70 members of seven selected Ministries with the support of the Chief Secretary through the Management Association of Nepal (MAN). The Futures Group selected key ministries and provided with technical assistance to improve their HIV policy frameworks and implementation. The Futures Group then conducted operational policy assessments with NCASC and relevant ministries to remove policy blockages and to promote effective implementation. Coordination and collaboration with seven key Ministries has resulted in the development of an HIV and AIDS work plan for each Ministry, three of which allocated funds for Nepali fiscal year 2065-2066.

In an additional effort to sensitize important national institutions and bring down barriers, the ASHA Project worked with the Nepal Armed Police Force (APF) and Local Development Training Academy

(LDTA) to adapt and adopt an HIV and AIDS training curriculum into their regular training sessions. The APF has internalized HIV and AIDS issues through the establishment of an HIV and AIDS Cell and Steering Committee to ensure the sustainability of the program. The LDTA has committed itself to incorporate the HIV and AIDS curriculum into each one of its training sessions.

“ASHA Project has played a great role in Nepal, especially at the policy level... (they) helped to initiate the HIV and AIDS Bill for the rights of PLHA... They have done a great deal of work with the armed forces... Played a great role in strengthening the DACC... They have put a focus on female groups, there was one association for PLHA, but now there is one for women also and also for women drug users. They have really strengthened the capacity.”

**DR. LAXMI RAJ PATHAK,
DIRECTOR, NCASC**

PROVIDE SUPPORT AND TRAINING TO LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AND ADVOCACY

In an effort to raise the voices of marginalized groups, most notably those of women who still suffer from great social and gender inequality in Nepal, the Futures Group provided capacity building and mentoring to local NGOs and CBOs to strengthen networks and promote participation in national and district-level policymaking.

Through this support the first National Federation of Women Living with HIV or AIDS was formed. Designed as a forum for a safe and supportive space, the Federation has provided an environment for women living with HIV or AIDS to join forces and advocate for their rights and access to treatment and care and discuss their unique needs. Female drug users, a well-hidden and highly stigmatized group, were supported through Dristi Nepal. This NGO run by former female drug users provides treatment and rehabilitation, life-skills training and income generation skills to former and current female drug users. The ASHA Project provided the support for this organization to develop advocacy tools to inform and raise awareness to government, donors, and stakeholders.

Complementing this effort, a media walk to affected regions in the far west region brought journalists face to face with infected and affected individuals and provided a live outlet for their stories and issues to be broadcast. This event provided a live audience, in both the media personnel attending and the general public, to hear the voices and concerns of infected and affected people first-hand.

CONDUCTING CAPACITY BUILDING WITHIN FINANCE AND PLANNING USING FUTURES GROUP'S GOALS MODEL

To improve understanding of resource needs, funding flows and equitable targeting, the Futures Group did an analysis using the GOALS Model. This computer software model assists in calculating how much funding is required to achieve the goals laid out in the National HIV Strategic Plan and what the effect of different patterns of resource allocation will have on achieving various program goals. The GOALS Model has been integrated into the National Action Plan for HIV and AIDS 2008-2011 for a pilot trial. This Model has been designed to analyze costs, impacts and alternative resource allocation scenarios. This analysis will provide information to policymakers to aid in the decision making processes for the most efficient use of funds.

KEY SUCCESSSES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

I. PROMOTING AND PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS: FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND DEBATE FOR THE ENACTMENT OF THE HIV & AIDS BILL

In 2003, the NCASC, in collaboration with the Futures Group POLICY Project/Nepal and the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), conducted a legislative audit of laws, policies, and executive orders in Nepal in accordance with the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights. Based on this audit, the legal system in Nepal scored 40 points out of a possible 100. This indicated a strong need for active policy reform to safeguard the human rights of people living with HIV and AIDS and to foster an environment free of discrimination and stigmatization.

While the Futures Group facilitated significant progress in the development and drafting of the HIV and AIDS Bill, the processes involved were difficult. Working in the context of a new political order and an unstable political environment within a developing country presents many obstacles and difficulties. The fluid political system that exists in Nepal allows for many abrupt changes within the sectors. In this context it is very difficult to maintain commitment. In some cases, months of lobbying and advocacy for the HIV and

AIDS Bill as a priority may become moot due to changing appointments.

The Futures Group, FLWD, and its partners worked tirelessly to advocate for the enactment of the HIV and AIDS Bill, but there is only so much these groups can do,



“ HIV is still second to the other priority issues, such as developing the Constitution and the peace building process, but we are in the process of developing a proposal for Parliament in order to promote full discussion and gather member commitment for HIV and AIDS. ”

**HONORABLE MR. SHARAD SINGH BHANDARI,
MINISTER OF TOURISM
AND CIVIL AVIATION**

since actual ratification lies in the hands of the government. In the face of shifting leaders, agendas, and priorities it will require dedication, persistence, and perseverance to establish sustainable commitments to the enactment of this Bill. Despite political disturbances in the country advocacy efforts for the enactment of the HIV and AIDS Bill have been persistently pursued.

Mobilizing Support

The influential persons who were mobilized to become Policy Champions for HIV and AIDS included:

- Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Parliament
- Representatives from various political parties serving in the Interim Parliament
- Senior advocates
- Policy-level bureaucrats
- Top-level civil servants
- Celebrities
- Media

The Honorable Justice Kalyan Shrestha demonstrated his commitment and solidarity by joining hands with the response to the AIDS Epidemic in Nepal. In an effort to promote awareness and advocacy among his colleagues and peers he posed a question. Pondering why it is only the infected, affected and vulnerable groups who

“With support from ASHA Project we developed the idea of Policy Champions... This policy champion idea has really worked... there is now an enabling environment.”

**SABIN SHRESTHA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FWLD**

speak out on issues of HIV and AIDS, he posed that it is because the sensitive stakeholders in government, political leaders and service providers have neglected thus far to do so. “Unless we allocate an adequate budget, we cannot stop ourselves from being Africa. Right to life is not a right to breath; rather it is a life with dignity, with employment, with livelihood.”

The Honorable Subash Chandra Nembang, Speaker, Interim Legislative Parliament, said that the “Legislative Parliament plays a crucial role at one stage of passing the legislation and we are ready to play this crucial role as a Policy Champion.”

Concerned Group for HIV and AIDS and Human Rights
FWLD facilitated the formation of the Concerned Group for HIV and AIDS and Human Rights, a

pressure group with representation from most at risk populations and NGOs working for their human rights. On March 6, 2007, the pressure group organized its first consultation meeting to collect views and incorporate development from stakeholders on the HIV and AIDS Bill for further legal reformation.

In September 2007, the group organized a second consultation meeting with media personnel focusing on legislative processes and critical issues concerning the Bill. Following participation in this consultation meeting, journalists produced numerous stories, features and radio programs relaying reliable and relevant information. This served to increase public understanding of the Bill and supported advocacy organization’s efforts to lobby for its passage.

Parliamentarians Take the Lead

A consultation meeting was held with the members of the Parliamentary Committee on Education, Health and Population to introduce a draft of the HIV and AIDS Bill and to request that the committee members take the lead for its enactment. Following the consultation meeting, a national workshop entitled ‘The Need of HIV and AIDS Laws in Nepal’ was held on January 2, 2008 under the



“It is not enough to talk just about the content (of the HIV and AIDS Bill) because the process has been very important. Everyone has been included, put in their input and agreed.”

**ADV. SAPANA PRADHAN
MALLA, PRESIDENT, FWLD;
MEMBER, CONSTITUENT
ASSEMBLY/PARLIAMENT;
APLF LEAD FOR NEPAL,
POLICY CHAMPION**

leadership of the Parliamentary Committee on Education, Health and Population and in conjunction with concerned groups for HIV and AIDS and Human Rights, and the Forum for Women, Law and Development. The meeting was a great success acting as a significant platform to share and discuss the need for laws and the proposed Draft Laws on HIV and AIDS.

Supreme Court Order

On December 25, 2008 the Supreme Court ordered the government to enact laws that ensured confidentiality in the judicial process for cases involving people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) and sensitive issues of women and children.

The process of dialogue and debate for enactment of the HIV and AIDS Bill 2064 still continues. The unstable political situation has been a major barrier. Adv. Sapna Malla, an active member of the Constituent Assembly and the President of FWLD is a dedicated policy champion and continues to work hard in support of the enactment of the Bill.

“ Passing HIV and AIDS legislation is only half of it, once it is passed we are hoping to have a series to address the enforcement level and the beneficiary level. We need to do more work on how to really implement the law. ”

**SABIN SHRESTHA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FWLD**

2. BUILDING LOCAL COMMITMENTS: STRENGTHENING 15 DISTRICT AIDS COORDINATION COMMITTEES

The District AIDS Coordination Committee (DACC) is the district-level coordinating body for HIV programs. In order to function efficiently and effectively, these DACCs require sustainable means for capacity building. The National HIV/AIDS Strategy 2007–2011 reiterates this necessity and further recognizes the need for DACCs to become fully functioning district-level management and coordination bodies with the capacity to support a multisectoral and decentralized HIV response.

In March 2007, the National Center for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC) established the National Working Group on Decentralization and Multi-Sectoral Response. This working group, of which the Futures Group was formerly an active member, is made up of participants representing key stakeholders who are combining their efforts to coordinate on issues of decentralization and DACC strengthening. To further the efforts of this working group by providing accurate information pertaining to current DACC functions, the Futures Group and the NCASC conducted an assessment of the statuses of various



“ DACC has to play a greater role than NCASC, HIV is not only a public health problem but a development problem; all sectors need to be involved. ”

**DR. LAXMI RAJ PATHAK,
DIRECTOR NCASC**

DACCs throughout Nepal. The resulting report provided pertinent information to key stakeholders at all levels and served to further increase coordination in strengthening capacity in the districts.

Further to this endeavor, the Futures Group’s capacity building efforts to support the 15 DACCs included orientations aimed at:

- Increasing DACC members’ knowledge of HIV
- Enhancing their leadership and advocacy skills and

- Strengthening capacity for collaboration

This investment enabled DACC members to lead the process in the development of their District AIDS Plans. The Futures Group provided financial and technical assistance through workshops and consultation meetings throughout the HIV and AIDS work planning process to 15 DACCs in Sunsari, Dhanusha, Gulmi, Argakhachi, Baglung, Pokhara, Lamjung, Makwanpur, Parsa, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Bajang, Baitadi, Rolpa, and Pyuthan districts.

The DACCs face many challenges, first and foremost of which is mobilizing resources. The implementation of the District AIDS Plans requires an infusion of resources.

3. SECURING HIGH LEVEL COMMITMENT FOR A MULTISECTORAL RESPONSE: DEVELOPING AN HIV & AIDS WORK PLAN IN SEVEN KEY MINISTRIES

A key function of Futures Groups' participation in ASHA Project was to support the integration of HIV and AIDS activities in the Ministries of the Nepal Government. To achieve this, partnerships were established with the Management Association of Nepal (MAN) and Team Leader, former Chief Secre-

tary, Dr. Bimal Koirala to conduct programs to sensitize seventy high level officials and important staff members from seven key ministries. These included:

- Ministry of Health and Population
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ministry of Local Development
- Ministry of Labor and Transport
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare
- Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

These programs were designed to facilitate internalization of HIV and AIDS issues, overcome stigma and discrimination and increase political commitment. Through the leadership of the current Chief Secretary, Mr. Bhojraj Ghimire, an HIV and AIDS inter-ministerial committee has been set up to promote better coordination between these seven ministries. Each Ministry identified an HIV and AIDS focal person and developed a terms of reference.

The focal persons received intense orientations on HIV and AIDS which enabled them to take the lead in orienting their respective staff and in facilitating the development of a one year HIV and AIDS work plan. Funds were allocated in

“The line Ministries have worked and an environment had been created that accepts HIV as a multisectoral problem, not just a health problem; this has been a major contribution of ASHA Project... ASHA Project positively contributed by creating the institutional framework within the Ministry; because of their involvement they have pushed for the programs and incorporated them into the annual budget.”

**DR. BHOJRAJ GHIMIRE,
CHIEF SECRETARY**

the work plans of three key Ministries, the Ministry of Local Development, the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Labor and Transport Management, for the Nepali fiscal year 2065 – 2066 (2008-2009). The HIV/AIDS and STD Control Board will continue to hold regular meetings to facilitate information exchange and promote collaboration across these Ministries.

While the Futures Group and its partners facilitated significant advancements working with the

Ministries, the processes involved in establishing these commitments were difficult. Working in the context of a new political order and an unstable political environment within a developing country presents many obstacles and difficulties. The fluidity of the current political system which exists in Nepal allows for many abrupt changes within the sectors. In this context it is very difficult to maintain commitment and in some cases months of lobbying and advocacy for HIV and AIDS as a priority may become moot due to changing appointments. To develop a sustainable commitment to HIV and AIDS issues within the Government of Nepal requires dedicated leadership, persistence and perseverance to institutionalize HIV and AIDS to ensure its priority regardless the ruling party and agendas.

4. MARCHING FORWARD IN HIV & AIDS PREVENTION: THE ARMED POLICE FORCE

The Futures Group supports the strengthening of Uniformed Services in response to HIV and AIDS through various interventions. These include advocacy to senior officials, the establishment of a women's association, technical assistance for the development of an HIV and AIDS curriculum to be integrated into regular training



HIV and AIDS Cell Secretary DSP Prasad Gautam and DSP Anjani Pokharel standing beside the APF HIV and AIDS Cell Office, APF Headquarters

programs and the provision of ToT to training officers for the implementation of this curriculum.

To ensure comprehensive management and coordination of all HIV and AIDS activities within the APF, an HIV and AIDS Cell and Steering Committee was formed to lead and advise on the development process of an HIV and AIDS curriculum. This curriculum was endorsed by then Armed Police Force Inspector General, Mr. Basu Dev Oli, and was disseminated in the nine regional training centers, ensuring the sustainability of the program. The main goals of this manual were to:

- Strengthen the capacity of the APF to respond to HIV, AIDS and STI epidemics efficiently;

- Prevent and reduce the spread and impact of HIV, AIDS and STIs among APF personnel and their families and;
- Equip APF personnel with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to serve the society more effectively in the fight against HIV, AIDS and STIs.

Chapters discuss the basics of HIV/AIDS, STIs, VCT, care and support, stigma and discrimination, protecting the rights of vulnerable groups and interfacing with vulnerable groups.

This curriculum aims to provide APF personnel with the knowledge to:

- Understand the global scenario of HIV/AIDS

- To develop positive attitudes towards initiatives to address HIV/AIDS and STI and those infected and affected;
- To have an understanding of the social factors behind the spread of HIV/AIDS and STIs;
- Utilize this knowledge to avoid risky behaviors.

During the dissemination programs, open dialogue between APF officers and people living with HIV encouraged improved attitudes of

“When we started this project three years ago we had no idea of HIV/AIDS. Higher level officials questioned whether this program was needed, but then we sensitized them and now they understand the gravity of this issue. Now they understand that our people are vulnerable and they give their consent for programs to be conducted... We have institutionalized HIV in and APF HIV and AIDS Cell to ensure the program will be sustained.”

DSP ANJANI POKHAREL

the officers towards vulnerable groups. As one APF officer stated, *“I have always thought HIV positive people were sickly and thin but after meeting a healthy positive lady today, I have changed my mind and know HIV positive people can lead a healthy life like any one of us!”* This is further confirmed by former General Secretary of the Steering Committee DSP Anjani Pokharel, *“Stigma and discrimination has been reduced; in the beginning a victim of HIV could not share this, now we believe they can come openly.”*

The integration of an HIV and AIDS component into regular training will have a tremendous impact reaching approximately 1300 officers each year. As the force is predominately made up of young men who spend a significant portion of their time away from their families and homes, it is hoped that this curriculum, in unraveling the mysteries of sex and sexuality, will encourage safer behaviors. The implementation of this training component will promote internalization of HIV and AIDS knowledge, encourage safer sex practices and address stigma and discrimination within the force.

The introduction of HIV and AIDS and its establishment as an important issue within the APF has prompted the Cell and Steering Committee to pursue its efforts and

scale up. It is anticipated that VCT will be introduced in the APF General Hospital sometime in the near future with support from the government and NCASC.

Although ASHA project has been a catalyst in starting up HIV and AIDS programs, sustained efforts are needed from high level leaders within the APF to continue the program and ensure its quality.

5. INSTITUTIONALIZING HIV & AIDS: INTEGRATING TRAINING PROGRAMS INTO THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING ACADEMY

The Local Development Training Academy (LDTA) is a public autonomous national training institution that provides training to all local government organizations, such as DDCs, VDCs and municipalities, as well as to local development partners. Each year the LDTA and its regional training centers conduct several beneficial training courses in their five regional training centers. The majority of these trainings are geared towards improving the planning and management capabilities in line with the Local Self Governance Act and By-Laws on issues such as:

- Development
- Health
- Education

- Agriculture

Recognizing the opportunity for a strategic entry point to reach future and current members of all local government organizations with HIV and AIDS information and awareness, the Futures Group targeted LDTA as an HIV and AIDS training outlet.

Through consultation with NCASC, Futures Group, and



“ In our training programs we are very successful. We invite PLHA women and men and after the trainings our participants shake their hands and the women embrace. In this way you can really see the changes.”

**MR. BINAY KAFLE,
PRINCIPAL, THE WOMEN
DEVELOPMENT TRAINING
CENTER, LDTA**

vulnerable groups, the LDTA designed a curriculum for HIV and AIDS to incorporate into their training sessions. The curriculum provides:

- Basic information on HIV and AIDS
- An overview of the epidemic
- Information on stigma and discrimination with an emphasis on the changing attitudes towards MARPs
- The rights of infected and affected people
- The roles of civil servants

These training sessions are designed to enable local government employees to better understand HIV and AIDS issues and encourage support to programs in the districts. The collaborative process between LDTA and Futures Group allowed for LDTA to take ownership of the program. The training curriculum was endorsed by LDTA and disseminated in their regional training centers. This program is a positive step in fostering HIV and AIDS champions within the local authorities.

In continuation of this successful program, LDTA has integrated HIV and AIDS components into their regular training programs thereby consistently contributing to HIV and AIDS competency among local authorities and communities.

“ Because of the stigma and discrimination towards HIV and AIDS and the status of women in this country it is hard for women to come out, but because of the Federation women have a way to portray themselves... Very few people had trust in the women, ASHA Project gave them the possibility to come up front and take the lead and come forward and work for themselves.”

DICHEN MOKTAN

6. RAISING THEIR VOICE: THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST FEDERATION OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV OR AIDS IN NEPAL

“I want to share so many things in a meeting but I am really nervous to speak. I have hardly gone to these kinds of meetings because I am so busy with the household work and I really do not understand the politics in these meetings...”

The statement above is representative of many vulnerable women in Nepal as gender inequalities and discrimination remain prominent. Thus far activism for HIV and



Program Coordinator Dichen Moktan and Co-Founder and Program Manager Chirring Sherpa at the Federation for Women Living with HIV and AIDS

AIDS has been a domain largely dominated by men due to barriers of inequality.

Social constraints such as prevailing ideas surrounding a women's "role" limiting her to household activities and low literacy rates resulting in self-consciousness in articulating public speech, hinder women's meaningful participation in planning, implementation and decision-making forums. In the face of these barriers, a group of women living with HIV have come together to create a voice and support one another in the form of the National Federation of Women Living with HIV or AIDS.

In July 2007, the Futures Group supported the first National Consultation Meeting of women living with HIV or AIDS. Fifty

women from the five regions of Nepal belonging to various organizations and government entities came together in response to the fragmentation of NGOs and community-based organizations representing and serving women to launch a National Federation of Women Living with HIV or AIDS in Nepal. Their main objective was to unite their voices and develop an Action Plan, which, as of May 2009, was still in its finalization stages.

The Federation has carried out programs for mentoring and strengthening leadership and advocacy skills, and run support group meetings promoting solidarity. These activities have assisted in providing an outlet for voices in fifteen districts with financial and technical support from the Futures Group.

Although a stronger network base is critical to provide the coordination and organization needed to influence programs and policies that address the special needs of women living with HIV/AIDS in order to reduce their vulnerability and mitigate the impact of HIV, the Federation is optimistic about moving forward. They have successfully solicited funds from donors including the Global Fund to continue and expand their activities and are representing women living with HIV in the Country Coordination Committee. By applying the skills and knowledge gained from advocacy and leadership trainings, members are currently engaged in several advocacy activities with PLHA groups throughout the five regions.

“We feel honored to be a part of ASHA Project. It is pride to be part of an organization that looks out not only for the organizations but for the individual and seeks opportunities for them. I would always like to be part of an environment that is so supportive of PLHA women.”

CHIRRING SHERPA

While full involvement and acceptance of an independent Federation of Women Living with HIV or AIDS in Nepal's HIV response will take time, the efforts of increasingly skilled and engaged women leaders in the country are bringing that day ever closer.

7. BREAKING THE SILENCE: TAKING THE LEAD TO ADVOCATE FOR FEMALE DRUG USERS IN NEPAL

Due to high levels of stigma and discrimination facing female drug users in Nepal, the needs of this marginalized group are largely overlooked in the development and planning of programs. In recognition of this social isolation, the Futures Group worked in partnership with Dristi Nepal, an NGO run by former female drug users, to attend to the issues challenging female drug users including treatment and rehabilitation, life skills, gender based violence, and income generation skills. In addition, the Futures Group and Dristi Nepal worked together to advocate for the inclusion of a comprehensive approach to HIV prevention, care and treatment designed to target this high risk group.

Dristi Nepal serves as an umbrella organization consolidating the efforts of female drug user groups and helping them work together to



“ASHA Project is like God for us – not because of the money, but because we never dreamed we could do it this way. We now have 23 female drug users working in our organization through capacity building and advocating at their own level.”

**PARINA SUBBA LIMBU,
DIRECTOR, DRISTI NEPAL**

meet their needs and advocate for their rights. In an effort to develop the institutional capacity of Dristi Nepal and to develop capacity for advocacy and leadership of former FDU's for meaningful involvement and reintegration into society, trainings were provided in areas such as:

- Leadership
- Project management
- Proposal writing
- Computer skills
- Personality and career development

While these trainings enabled Dristi Nepal and to improve the quality of their services and mobilize additional resources, a network of FDU's was formed. This network aimed to engage FDU's to come together, share, discuss, learn, and establish a trusting and encouraging environment to support safe behaviors and living. During one of these group discussions held in July 2007, an orientation on HIV/AIDS, STIs and reproductive health was provided to twenty FDU's; this orientation proved to be very effective in demonstrated safer sex practices.

Identifying the need for an advocacy tool, technical assistance was provided to Dristi Nepal to equip former female drug users with the skills to collect and record information on current female drug users. Information was obtained with consent during monthly support group meetings, regional meetings, and interactions. A key achievement, the data collected has provided information regarding practices and behaviors of female drug users in Nepal. This data has then served to inform and raise

awareness to the government, donors and stakeholders on the previously hidden issues of female drug users. Expanding their reach, Dristi Nepal facilitated the formation of a branch office in the neighboring district of Dharan in 2008.

Dristi Nepal organized and held the first women only consultation meeting in Kathmandu on the 11th and 12th of May, 2009. Fifty nine women from organizations in Chitwan, Bhutwal, Pokhara and Dharan attended and contributed to the meeting in order to develop a work plan and the 2009 Nepal Declaration to Existence, Inclusiveness. The Declaration was signed by all in attendance to “commit to take the lead, lobby, and implement” and urging for:

- Disaggregated data on women who use drugs
- Policy makers to address and incorporate the issues of women who use drugs into the draft of the forthcoming Drug Act of 2063
- Their issues to be addressed and included in the National Policy for Drugs, HIV and AIDS and health related issues.

The support provided by to Dristi Nepal has provided these women with the skills and strength to take the lead and demand recognition, respect, access to services and

human rights. Although they have made great strides forward, they still require support for further advocacy and capacity building to ensure their achievements are sustained.

8. A FIRST-HAND APPROACH TO SENSITIZING MEDIA PROFESSIONALS: MEDIA WALK IN THE FAR WESTERN REGION

“Broadcast media have tremendous reach and influence, particularly with young people, who represent the future and are the key to any successful fight against HIV and AIDS. We must seek to engage these powerful organizations as full partners in the fight to halt HIV and AIDS through awareness, prevention and education.”

– Kofi Annan, Former United Nations Secretary-General

In an era of globalization, media outlets function as a source of socialization, providing information which shape attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of individuals, communities and societies. Its far reach and influence puts media in the unique position to provide a broad audience with fact-based knowledge and information which in turn provides a basis for social composition and interaction. In the context of HIV and AIDS, media serves as an integral outlet

for outreach and communication to reduce the spread of the epidemic and to advocate for the rights of infected and affected individuals.

In recognition of this potential, the Futures Group partnered with Conscious Media Forum (CMF), the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, and Rashtriya Dalit Network



“We’re proud that when we started working for the ASHA Project we had few discussions about HIV positive children. After the media walk, there was lots of coverage of HIV positive children. Now, line Ministries are working for HIV positive children which is a huge achievement.”

**GOKARNA BHATT,
FORMER CHAIRPERSON,
CMF**

Nepal to support a media walk in the far western region from the 24th of November to the 5th of December 2007.

This walk was designed with the aim of sensitizing Nepali media representatives on the socio-economic and cultural issues related to HIV and AIDS. The 21 participating journalists from every district in the far west, including Kathmandu, visited five highly affected districts. During their visits to Kailali, Dadeldhura, Doti, Achham, and Kanchanpur districts, the media professionals interacted with PLHA, local people, district health authorities, NGOs, CBOs, and others to gain sensitization on HIV and AIDS issues and programs to protect the rights of affected and infected people residing in the far west. Additional outcomes included strengthening and enhancing the capacity of media representatives to develop investigative and analytical skills and encouraging regular reporting on HIV and AIDS

This program was different from regular trainings in that the journalists were presented with the opportunity to visit the villages and directly interact with beneficiary groups and service providers. Throughout the duration of the walk, the journalists reported directly from the field through contact with various local radio

stations via telephone. These first-hand experiences and accounts served to enhance the empathy of media professionals and improve the overall quality of HIV-related reporting, thereby influencing not only media employees, but the broader public as well.

The media walk was highly successful in:

- Sensitizing journalists on the social, economic, and cultural problems associated with HIV/AIDS
- Strengthening the role of the media to engage in long-term discussions on stigma and discrimination and policy issues for infected and affected people and
- Drawing effective attention to the situation of HIV and AIDS in the far western region.

The success is evidenced by a site visit to infected and affected women and children prompted by reporting from a participating journalist. Following the media coverage, a team from the National Network of Positive People visited Jogbudha VDC in Dadeldhura to conduct an assessment and design potential interventions to assist infected and affected women and children in the area. Based on their assessment NAP+N began to provide assistance to WLHA in this district.

“ I could not believe that HIV can have such an immense impact on society, I just heard the news, sometimes covered too, but now I feel that it must be one of the major issues of reporting for journalists like us.”

**BACHHU B.K.,
PARTICIPATING
JOURNALIST**

As a direct result of the media walk, the support provided to this marginalized group afforded a WLHA from this district with the strength to participate in the 3rd National HIV/AIDS Conference in Nepal held in Kathmandu six months later. This woman shared her story and the impact that the media walk had on her and the lives of her fellow WLHA.

A similar circumstance occurred in a Dalit village outside of Kailali where 31 of 300 inhabitants were found to be living with HIV or AIDS without any support. As a result of the coverage gained during the media walk this community has been provided support to start their own organization for PLHA.

In addition to the media walk, the Futures Group supported further strengthening of the media through

three trainings conducted by CMF at the regional level in the Eastern, Mid-Western and Far-Western Regions. Participants consisted of journalists working in radio, television and print media and were selected on the basis of their interests, gender and media house.

These trainings provided a platform for participants to:

- Share their knowledge and/or experiences of HIV and AIDS
- Have a forum for disseminating knowledge on the biology of HIV and its mode of transmission to AIDS and the treatment available
- Discuss broader structural issues of HIV, including gender and HIV, the national response to HIV, ethics, and issues regarding HIV and local HIV issues.

With the field journalists equipped with the knowledge and understanding to conduct their investigations and analyses, it was important to ensure that their supervisors were sensitized as well. In recognition of this, the Futures Group conducted a one-day orientation for 14 journalists and sub-editors in Kathmandu to promote sensitization of the issues. This training focused on pertinent social components of HIV/AIDS so that they would not be deemed irrelevant or deleted from an article. In addition, it focused on establishing a com-

mon understanding of what appropriate versus inappropriate language when discussing HIV and AIDS.

Although this orientation was a success, a wider array of participants from higher levels within the media, including senior editors, is required to ensure appropriate reporting, coverage and language in HIV and AIDS coverage.

9. BUILDING NATIONAL CAPACITY FOR IMPROVED RESOURCE MOBILIZATION: INTRODUCING THE GOALS MODEL

In 2007, the government of Nepal expanded its planning processes to include an analyses of the resources needed to meet targets and the expected impact in the reduction of new HIV infections if said targets are met. Moreover, the government expressed interest in exploring

alternative resource allocation scenarios in order to identify other strategies that may be more cost-effective than those currently specified in the National Action Plan.

In this context, the Futures Group, in collaboration with the NCASC, initiated the application of the GOALS model. This model assists in calculating how much funding is required to achieve the goals of the National HIV Strategic Plan and what the effect of different patterns of resource allocation for achieving said program goals will be. By using the GOALS model, one can link future HIV incidence and prevalence with the strategic plan's future level of expenditure. In this way, the impact of the increased expenditure can be seen on the change in the epidemic in the future.



Ms. Bina Pokharel, Technical Advisor; Mr. Mahesh Sharma, Executive Member; and Dr. Sharad Onta, Vice Chair and Chief Executive of HSCB at the HSCB Headquarters

“This model has a lot of positive aspects because it offers different options for interventions; this is very important for designing the National Action Plan.”

DR. SHARAD ONTA

A consultation group comprising members of government, civil society, and experts was formed by Futures Groups to advise on the processes of GOALS implementation. The Futures Group hired a consultant to collect and input the data for the model. It also held a series of confirmation meetings with the stakeholders and consultation groups for data finalization.

The five-day GOALS Model training, held in Pokhara, was facilitated by international Futures Group GOALS Model experts, Dr. Naline Sangrujee and Ms. Rachel Sanders. Altogether 22 people representing various sectors were trained.

To ensure that the model produces information that is useful to decisionmakers, the application of the model includes an extensive process of engagement with stakeholders to reflect the policy alternatives as closely as possible. Using the results from the GOALS

model, the Futures Group did a cost-effectiveness analysis to examine the estimated cost per infection averted for the National Action Plan and alternative resource allocation scenarios. In the first step of the cost effectiveness analysis, all the scenarios were compared to the baseline which assumes no additional funding. The second stage of the cost-effectiveness analysis compares different scenarios to each other to examine the cost-effectiveness of one strategy over another.

The final output was a report outlining an analysis of the costs and impacts of the National Action Plan (2008-2011) as well as alternative resource allocation scenarios. The Futures Group disseminated the report to stakeholders, and it is expected that the report will provide information to policymakers to assist and aid in the decisionmaking processes for the most efficient use of the limited funds given the national priorities.

The GOALS Model has been accepted and incorporated into the National Action Plan (2008-2011) by the HIV/AIDS and STD Board. The Government plans to pilot the model in a small geographical region.

SUSTAINING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through a contract between FHI and Futures Group International, Futures Group worked in Nepal with ASHA Project from July 2006 through June 2009 under USAID Cooperative Agreement # 367-A-00-06-00067-00. The Advancing Surveillance, Policies, Prevention, Care and Support to Fight HIV/AIDS in Nepal (ASHA) Project is funded by USAID and implemented by Family Health International (FHI), Futures Group, and the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA). Focused on prevention, care and support activities among vulnerable populations ASHA worked to strengthen national capacity, provide technical leadership for strategic information, and create linkages among stakeholders.

Under this contract, Futures Group provided technical assistance to build the capacity of the Government of Nepal and civil society to manage and implement HIV/AIDS activities as well as to inform policy formulation at the national, local, and community levels to reduce stigma and discrimination and enable equitable access to services. In realizing these deliverables Futures Group has achieved significant success; these are highlighted below accompanied by recommendations for sustainability.

There have been tremendous achievements in establishing a committed environment for HIV and AIDS policy. The draft of the HIV and AIDS Bill has determined advocates on the national level from the NCASC, HSCB high-level officials and policy champions. With funds allocated for HIV and AIDS in three of the ministries, there is a clear indication that Nepal is moving forward to ensure HIV and AIDS is a top national priority.

Strong leadership is vital at all levels to fully understand the economic and social dimensions of the HIV epidemic and to succeed in efforts to get ahead of it. Endeavors at the Ministry level are equally important to those at the district line offices

“We hope it (the HIV and AIDS Bill) will be endorsed. [Because it hasn’t been yet], it shows that the policy level is still not interested in this issue... We need to convince the Ministers who need to convince the Cabinet... We are hoping that the Board as an institution can convince the Ministry.”

DR. SHARAD ONTA, HSCB

and must be pursued simultaneously and collaboratively to successfully translate plans into effective and timely local action. It is imperative that all levels work together to mainstream the issues and mobilize their action and commitment regardless of political uncertainties. The challenge is to internalize and prioritize the issues within the organizations so that regardless of leadership change or political agendas HIV and AIDS issues remain in focus as a priority.

“There is so much awareness and consciousness in society now. I am happy that people are taking safe measures. Before people didn’t know about condoms and safe sex, now if you ask, many people know about condoms and safe behavior... Transmission has been controlled in large part to ASHA Project and stigma has been minimized, but the effect still must be addressed.”

HONORABLE MR. SHARAD SINGH BHANDARI

Long-term sustainable development approaches are vital to an efficient response to HIV and AIDS. Working closely with institutions such as the Local Development Training

“We would like to continue the work that we have done with ASHA Project because our cycle is not complete. We have developed our training manual and trained our trainers... but that is not enough... now it is time to expand to the district level, the community level, to the villages... we have training centers, trainers, access to local bodies... we need to realize our potential in that regard... We need resources to develop facilitator courses to train trainers at the district level and build networks with local NGOs working for HIV and AIDS so we can work together. In that way we can be more effective.”

**MR. BINAY KAFLE,
PRINCIPAL, WOMEN
DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING CENTER**

Academy and the Armed Police Force in support of the integration of HIV and AIDS components into regular training programs encourages the fostering of government HIV and AIDS champions at both the national and local levels. These institutions have committed and internalized the issues and declared their dedication to retaining HIV and AIDS as a top priority.

In order to sustain these efforts and ensure the maintenance and quality of these programs a monitoring system must be put into place. While internalization and prioritization of HIV and AIDS issues within these institutions is a priority, it is imperative they remain so to guarantee continuity.

Although the Armed Police Force has made a strong commitment to HIV and AIDS, the lack of resources hinders its ability to conduct further trainings. There is a strong desire for refresher trainings to be conducted with high-level officials and for more visible and concrete programs to convince the leaders that HIV and AIDS trainings are having an impact. While ensuring that high-level officials are aware of the issues is integral to HIV and AIDS institutionalization, the Cell Secretary has noted that 90 percent of the APF is made up of non-commissioned officers who have

“The HIV and AIDS Cell focuses on every issue of HIV and AIDS... this is the sole authorized Cell to look after HIV and AIDS issues... We update the trainings, coordinate with other institutions and discuss the pertinent issues... we’re looking forward to strengthening the Cell with more resources.”

DSP A. POKHAREL

not been sensitized and are vulnerable; these individuals are in need of training on HIV and AIDS.

In the pursuit of internalizing HIV and AIDS issues and ensuring that personnel are sensitized, Current Cell Secretary DSP Prasad Gautam and Former Cell Secretary DSP Anjani Pokharel feel that the most pressing issue resides with APF personnel along the borders. Although the number of APF posted along the borders has dramatically increased, these personnel have not been sensitized to HIV and AIDS issues; *“Our role is to monitor HIV-infected people at the border, we must sensitize APF at the border to help with this.”* – DSP Anjani Pokharel

The establishment of the National Working Group on Decentralization and Multi-Sectoral Response has created a committed body of key stakeholders dedicated to coordination on issues of decentralization and DACC strengthening. The capacity building efforts increased DACC members' knowledge of HIV, enhanced their leadership and advocacy skills and strengthened capacity for collaboration, and thus have created a dedicated, well-informed, and cooperative environment to combat HIV and AIDS at the district levels.

Although highly effective, trainings are not always enough to develop commitment among leaders. Strengthening leadership capacity involves mentorship through one-on-one meetings, regular communication, resource sharing, study tours, facilitating interactions with beneficiary groups, and promoting issue internalization. Applying a mentorship approach in most districts would strengthen the DACCs by establishing relationships and encouraging knowledge sharing with its members. If DACC members do not fully grasp the magnitude and nature of the problem in their districts, they will not be committed to prioritizing the issues for a place on the national agenda. Developing multisectoral programs means developing and maintaining committed leaders.

“ Projects like the one supported by ASHA should be continued to be supported. If we regularly intervene with media... build the capacity and make them friendly and sensitize them so they can achieve our objectives... to do investigative journalism, not just the biology of HIV but the gender and socio-economic issues. ”

GOKARNA BHATT

The mass media serve as a poignant outlet for information exchange, advocacy, knowledge, and understanding. The media walk was a fantastic success in increasing media coverage and bringing to light the socio-economic and cultural issues faced by people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. However, there is still a need to sensitize higher-level editors, supervisors, and media representatives to ensure their commitment to unbiased, fair, and accurate reporting of HIV and AIDS issues through prioritizing pertinent articles and using appropriate objective language.

The leadership trainings, capacity building and dedicated support

“ We are a bridge for these women... (but) the Federation still needs to identify the gaps and issues and needs to see the lessons learned from foreign countries... We need donors to remain in order to ensure that the Federation can be sustained and to ensure it can look after itself. ”

DICHEN MOKTAN

provided to Dristi Nepal and the Federation for Women Living with HIV and AIDS has allowed their members to competently and confidently come forward to advocate for their issues on the national platform. These women have found their voice and with it have established an empowering environment for participation in programs, policy formulation, and advocacy. This meaningful participation is achieved through mutual trusting relationships. It is necessary to first recognize women as women, thereby acknowledging their unique needs and social position, before identifying them as a person living with HIV or AIDS, a sex worker or a female drug user. Providing training and financial support for an NGO does not

“There is still much stigma and discrimination against women drug users... We are advocating for sensitizing the VCT for women and for the idea of a women-only VCT. Then the women will not feel judged and they will feel safe to go to VCT.”

PERINA SUBBA LUMBA

mean that it will be successful in its mission. Leadership skills are essential and most effective when provided through a mentorship approach. This includes:

- Explaining policy documents in Nepali
- Helping with presentation skills and speeches
- Assisting in networking with other leaders and groups
- Building self esteem, etc.

With these skills and higher confidence levels, women's groups are able to raise their voice with confidence to increase awareness of women's issues and advocate for their rights. To sustain the successes achieved, more effort must be put forth to advocate for the women's

“We have to have a feeling of ‘we’ – of course there are constraints – but when there are organizations working on advocacy and policy we must work in harmony and this could be improved simply by communicating with each other... Everyone in the country who is working for the same issue should respect each other for the role of sustainability in our efforts.”

**NARMADA ACHARYA,
ADVOCACY AND
PARTNERSHIP ADVISER,
UNAIDS**

rights at the government level and increased resources at the grassroots level.

The Futures Group has had significant success in mobilizing organizations and government entities from the local to the national level. Despite its significant achievements, Nepal is in the early stages of developing policy and establishing rights for people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. Much work is still required for policy

efforts with the involvement, support and coordination of many stakeholders in order to institutionalize the issues and build a sustainable commitment. As with any epidemic of this proportion, there is a need for coordination, collaboration and continuous interventions for policy work and advocacy.

The Futures Group has made its mark as a trusted, effective, and respected organization for capacity building and policy development. In order to sustain these efforts and encourage the continuation of advocacy efforts and dialogue on HIV and AIDS issues, the Futures Group recommends implementing systems to monitor commitment and encourage idea exchange and organizational coordination for HIV and AIDS issue prioritization.

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