HIV, Gender and Sustainable Livelihood

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Introduction

It is estimated that around 2.3 million people in India are currently living with HIV. Of these, an estimated 39 percent are female and 3.5 percent are children. Most of the HIV affected people are economically disadvantaged, and have limited capacity to pay for health care. The impact of HIV and AIDS reaches far beyond the health sector with severe economic and social consequences and the impact is much more severe on women than on men. Women and girls seem to bear the brunt of the pandemic in many ways and the disease disproportionately affects them psychologically, socially and economically.

In Tamil Nadu, home to 60 million people, there are 3.4 lakh HIV positive people, of which nearly 35 per cent are women. The first case of HIV in India was reported in Tamil Nadu in 1986. The prevalence rate of HIV in the state came down from 0.75 percent in 2003 to 0.50 percent in 2004 as result of its aggressive anti-transmission policies.

Several studies have been conducted on HIV and impact on Gender and livelihood in India, and Tamil Nadu. The researcher has for the past two years helped facilitate the design and implementation of a programme on sustainable livelihoods for women and has been part of a detailed situational analysis already conducted in at least 50 villages of Tiruchirapalli and Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. However this study specifically delves into the link between HIV and its impact on gender and livelihood in Tiruchirapalli district in Tamil Nadu and the relevance and effectiveness of potential solutions used to address them.

The target area

The HIV rate in Tiruchirapalli district in Tamil Nadu is on the rise. There are 12 Intensive Counselling and Testing Centres (ICTC’s) in the district and Nammakal has an Anti Retro Viral Therapy ART Centre. The study will concentrate on villages located in Thuraiyur, Musiri and Tiruchirapalli Clusters of Tiruchirapalli District located between 12-35 km of Tiruchirapalli – the district headquarters. Villagers currently living with HIV/AIDS in the target area live below the poverty line (on less than $1 per day), are mostly illiterate, have intermittent or no access to paid employment and own little or no land of their own.

This study is being done in collaboration with Mithra Foundation and Jeevika Trust. Mithra Foundation, a reputed non profit in Tiruchirapalli which since 1999, has implemented its health, income-generation and educational initiatives for the most disadvantaged social groups in 141 villages in the Tiruchirapalli (Trichy) and Cuddalore areas of Tamil Nadu, India. Jeevika Trust is a UK based organisation that works with communities in rural society, dalits and tribals – especially women, to help them build and sustain their individual, family and community livelihoods.

Mithra Foundation, with the support of Jeevika Trust has in 2008 implemented a sustainable livelihood project for over 150 people living with HIV/ AIDS. The project aims to support and build the socio-economic capacity of PLWHAs, while simultaneously improving understanding and acceptance of HIV/AIDS in the wider community.
Objective

This study in addition to a needs analysis also explores the efficacy of the livelihood approaches used, the relevance of activities keeping in mind context and environment, and the impact and outcomes of solutions offered.

The research (need analysis) focuses on aspects such as

- Knowledge, awareness and misconception about HIV and AIDS,
- Burden of care, domestic work and economic responsibilities on women in the HIV households and the role of women as caregivers;
- Health-seeking behaviour and out-of-pocket expenditure incurred by the HIV households on the treatment of opportunistic infections (OIs) suffered by the PLWHA;
- Enrolment of children in school, gender differences in the reasons for discontinuation of schooling and challenges faced in school;
- Stigma and discrimination experienced by the PLWHA in various contexts such as family, community, workplace and healthcare facilities;
- Status of HIV-positive widows.
- Level of available govt agency resources in support of HIV/AIDS in the targeted area.

In addition, the study explores

- An inventory of what is already being done, the traditional skills, resources and current capacities and how these can be strengthened and built upon.
- Impact of the livelihood programme implemented by Mithra among 150 HIV positive women in Tiruchirapalli district.
- Relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of implemented livelihood activities.
- Impact, outcome and sustainability of livelihood activities.
- Proposed intervention within the context of its long-term sustainability, its advocacy 'weightage' and linkages with other NGOs tackling the issue of HIV.

Methodology

The need analysis utilises the survey method (questionnaire) distributed to a sample group of 100 PLWHA (women) and their families. In addition, key informant interviews (at least 25) are being conducted with various stakeholders such as HIV positive women, their spouses, their families and others such as health officials, NGO staff etc.
Deliverables

- Build the capacity of Mithra and other partners of jeevika to extend and develop their delivery of women's livelihood projects.
- Strengthen co-operation and transferring skills and resources between JT and its partners.
- Build the capacity of disadvantaged groups of women to participate effectively in livelihood development projects by; deepening their understanding of the benefits, identifying and prioritising specific livelihood initiatives and establishing a baseline for monitoring future activities.
- Create a Project Proposal for an integrated and coherent plan of action which will deliver livelihood initiatives to a larger group of women and families infected and affected by HIV.
- Develop an advocacy plan that would enable Mithra to collaborate with local NGOs to be able to utilise research results to help them lobby locally for improvement of support services.
- Mobilisation of target groups (HIV women and their families) within each programme and encouraging ownership of any proposed initiatives and taking responsibility for tackling these issues and concerns through the development of new and existing women's self help groups.

References

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