

**GLOBAL POSTER CAMPAIGN
AGAINST HIV/AIDS-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION AND FOLLOW UP
ACTIVITIES
IN SIX SEED GRANT COUNTRIES:
A COMPILATION**

Leaders of faith communities have an essential role to play in transforming stigma and discrimination towards persons living with HIV/AIDS. Reducing discrimination promotes the dignity, human rights, health, and quality of life of people with HIV. It may also help to reduce transmission by increasing community use of voluntary counseling and testing services, as people become less ashamed or afraid to seek help. Working through their organized community structures, people of faith can create an effective and compassionate response to the multifaceted challenges presented by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Church World Service in 2003-2004 provided eight small grants in support of one such effort – an international poster competition organized by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) to mobilize churches in challenging the stigma and discrimination often associated with HIV/AIDS. An affiliate of the World Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance brings together 85 churches and church-related organizations worldwide for advocacy on HIV/AIDS and global trade. The voices, stories, and involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS were sought at every level of the EAA project.

The competition was organized at the country level by broad-based National Steering Committees (NSCs), usually consisting of representatives from faith-based organizations, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), government ministries, UNAIDS, youth, and other local or national organizations working on HIV/AIDS. Equipped with an informational “toolkit” developed by the

The EAA has now produced a CD-ROM with images of more than 80 winning posters, along with 100 multi-lingual fact sheets, worship resources and advocacy tools, available at no charge.(See<http://www.e-alliance.org> for more information.) Church World Service created a small version of the exhibit for use through its U.S. regional offices and at member communion conferences. Church World Service collaborated with the CORE Initiative to support National Steering Committees in implementing the Global Poster Campaign or follow up activities. The CORE Initiative provided funding for Global Poster Campaign activities in Armenia, **India (Tamil Nadu)**, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone, and follow up projects in India and Sierra Leone. Church World Service provided funds for Global Poster Campaign activities in Israel and the Sudan. Armenia, **India (Tamil Nadu)**, and Sierra Leone were later selected to be featured as case studies.

India

Dr. U. Irudayasamy of Chennai, India, learned about the Global Poster Competition through a conversation with EAA Coordinator Linda Hartke in May 2003. His colleague, Pastor Maria Sundar, researched the project on the web and decided to organize the project through the local NGO, Church for Social Concern (CSC). Pastor Sundar (director, Indian Rural Development Foundation), his wife Regina (director, Mass Empowerment for Growth Alternatives, a Christian women’s NGO), and Dr. Irudayasamy (director, CWS/CORE Initiative)

(Institute of Research and Development for the Rural Poor Trust) in 1999 formed CSC to provide training on social issues to independent pastors in the region. These three are the volunteer staff of CSC. The CWS seed grant for the Poster Competition was the organization's first. The project was launched in the state of Tamil Nadu, South India. The National Steering Committee was comprised of representatives from:

- CSC
- Faith in Action Ministry
- Revival Church
- Social Action Church World Service Christian Center for Community Services
- Clunies Social Service Center
- ECI Social Service Center
- Attur Evangelical Church
- Indian Network of Rural Pastors

NSC members were identified and chosen based on their dedication to addressing the problems due to HIV/AIDS, their relevant experience, and a known rapport and relationship among them. The target group was independent rural pastors in Tamil Nadu, where 67% of pastors are affiliated with independent churches. According to the NSC, most of these pastors have limited formal education and little access to information on social issues. They are scattered across wide distances and serve vulnerable populations.

The goal was to involve 200 independent rural pastors from across the 26 districts of Tamil Nadu in the project. Organizers succeeded in involving 119, stating that it was very difficult to convince the pastors to participate in an HIV/AIDS training event and many pastors resisted any association with HIV/AIDS because of its sexual connotations. Four regional training events were hosted – in Chennai, Nagercoil, Trichi, and Tiruvannamalai – where participants learned about HIV/AIDS, related stigma and discrimination, and the importance of churches being involved in HIV/AIDS work. Participants created posters as part of the workshop.

Each training workshop had a pre- and post-test questionnaire to assess the participants' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices (KABPs) – asking such questions as “If someone is HIV positive, would you share a meal with them?”, “If someone is HIV positive, do you work together?”, or “If a pastor is HIV positive, would you allow him/her to continue leading the congregation?” The post-tests indicated a 45% improvement overall in the tested knowledge and attitudes. Participatory evaluations were also conducted after the trainings

conclusions:

- Many of the pastors heard about HIV/AIDS for the first time.
- Pastors understood the need and challenges to the churches.
- Pastors learned about HIV/AIDS and can educate their congregational members.
- Pastors expressed an interest in providing voluntary counseling in the government VCT centers.
- Pastors expressed an interest in providing care and support to PLWHAs in their communities.
- Pastors expressed the belief that they can reduce stigma and discrimination and can strengthen referral to hospitals.
- Participants committed themselves to conduct two workshops each in their own communities after the training. Some used their posters as visual aids. Organizers noted

that only two of the 119 participants were women and proposed a follow-up activity targeting the women independent pastors.

In the **FOLLOW UP PROJECT**, independent women pastors in Tamil Nadu were targeted. Activities included:

- Mapping of women independent pastors through networks
- Training needs assessment done through questionnaires and by telephone
- One to one interactions
- One to group interactions

Target districts were selected based on risk behaviors, HIV/AIDS prevalence, and literacy rates. The goal was to train twenty women in each of five districts in each of the four zones, for a total of 800 women trained as trainers. The actual total trained was 746. Trained women pastors agreed to follow through by organizing awareness programs in their respective churches and out posts or outreach areas, with special emphasis given to reducing stigma and discrimination. With the women pastors each challenged to conduct three to four awareness programs in the first three months after training, the NSC expected 500 such programs would be undertaken as a direct result of the project.

Trainers reported that at first, the male pastors (husbands of the women pastors) did not want to send their wives independently and so accompanied them to the trainings. Though instructed to be silent observers during the women pastors' training events, the presence of the men was uncomfortable for the trainer and trainees because of the explicit nature of the segment on sexually transmitted diseases. Given this situation, the organizers asked the men to busy themselves elsewhere during the training itself and return for their wives at its conclusion. Comparing the training of the women pastors to that of the men, the facilitators noted that the women were more active in following through than the male pastors. After the training the women pastors took interest and organized follow-up programs in their churches, with the male pastors supporting them.

Feedback indicated that church members were co-operative and appreciated the women pastors for organizing such programs. In a few cases, the trained women pastors reported that church members had approached them for referral and testing. The women expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to receive such training, since such opportunities are most often include the male pastors only, elsewhere during the training itself and return for their wives at its conclusion. Comparing the training of the women pastors to that of the men, the facilitators noted that the women were more active in following through than the male pastors. After the training the women pastors took interest and organized follow-up programs in their churches, with the male pastors supporting them. Feedback indicated that church members were co-operative and appreciated the women pastors for organizing such programs. In a few cases, the trained women pastors reported that church members had approached them for referral and testing.

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