

Our Experience in HIV /AIDS Communication

The threat posed by HIV/AIDS is one of the most serious public health problems faced by India since independence. Around 2.5 million are estimated to be affected by HIV/AIDS (http://www.nacoonline.org/Quick_Links/HIV_Data).

In the absence of any cure, the only way to fight the disease is by ensuring prevention through widespread communication and awareness building. We have worked across the country (eleven states) for building mass awareness on HIV/AIDS using theatre based communication. In 2006, banglanatak dot com got National Award on Communication using Art & Culture from National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), UNAIDS and SAATHI – a network for Solidarity and Action Against The HIV Infection in India.

Our Target Groups

We have worked with rural and urban communities, women, adolescents and youth, slum dwellers, vulnerable groups like migrant workers, port workers, tourism workers, men having sex with men (MSM) and intervenous drug users (IDUs).

Our Communication Programmes

Our communication programmes have targeted

- Building risk perception and basic awareness on HIV.
- Building awareness on STI and RTI and encouraging improved health seeking behaviour.
- Enabling an environment of care and support and reducing stigma against PLHAs.

Why Theatre ?

We have trained theatre groups and local folk artists across India in theatre based communication. Drama creates ‘real’ environment for educating people. Multiple view points and perspectives are easily dealt through dialogue and scenario building. Men and women, irrespective of their level of education or awareness can easily understand the visual portrayal of issues and messages.

Local artists performing the shows easily create a sense of identity, and community trust building and acceptance is achieved in the process of intervention. Further communication is two way. The process is participative, and inclusive. In interactive theatre, as the actors ask the audiences questions, they get involved. This creates a public platform for discussion for sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases which is otherwise difficult.

Strengthening Communication at Grassroots

We train health workers, NGO workers, local theatre groups and folk artists in using art and culture based tools for HIV communication. We help strengthen their communication skills.

- We have worked with health workers at Rajasthan, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, inter person communicators at six ports across the country, outreach workers of NGOs in Bhubaneswar and Amritsar.
- Folk artists at Kalajatha in Rajasthan, Chau, Gambhira in West Bengal, local theatre groups in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Punjab, and West Bengal have been trained through capacity building workshops.
- We have undertaken capacity building in ground communication with community based resource groups and inter personal communicators for sustained campaigning in 5 districts towns of Andhra Pradesh (on behalf of PSI).

Though edutainment is a powerful tool, message dilution is a common problem and productions always need to be controlled for correct message dissemination. We advise and provide capacity building support to NACO for strengthening theatre based communication across the country.

Using Theatre for Participatory Research

Theatre shows are easily adaptable to change as per area specific needs. Mass media or video films cannot have such localized or customized account. We use theatre to understand local factors leading to increased risk and vulnerability. The theatre shows help to reach out at random to large groups of audiences and thus scores over conventional research where achieving a representative sample from community often becomes a challenge. A public platform for discussion and dialogue is created as theatre helps to overcome barriers like shyness, fear and reticence to respond to questions. Using this approach, we have mapped vulnerabilities among tourism workers and rural communities in Rajasthan (Project CHARCA supported by UNAIDS), slum dwellers in Amritsar and Bhubaneswar (supported by HIV Alliance and Interact). This was followed by extensive awareness campaigns across these locations.

Mobilising People led Action

We mobilise community led action to reduce HIV/AIDS vulnerability by empowering youth, adolescents and women with knowledge, skills and improved access to testing and treatment services. We use theatre for building life skills and communication skills.

- We have worked with tourism stakeholders (taxi drivers, auto-rickshaw drivers, tourist guides, hoteliers, shopkeepers, tourist police) in Udaipur, slum women at Amritsar and Bhubaneswar, youth and adolescents at Kishanganj and Udaipur.
- We have mobilised networking of multiple stakeholders like Panchayat (local governance), local administration, local NGOs and grass root workers from diverse sectors (Sanitation, Health, HIV, Family planning) (National Rural Health Mission & CHARCA at Udaipur). We have also provided linkages between community and service providers for furthering the cause of advocacy. Linkages between community and service providers.

***Further information and reports available at
<http://www.banglanatak.com/sectorHiv.aspx>***