

Programme Area Summary

Country: India

Programme Area: HIV & AIDS

What is the aim of the programme area?

To enable people living with HIV and AIDS to access their rights of equality of access to mainstream development and other opportunities and services

Why is VSO working in that particular Programme Area and region?

As in other countries, it is clear that the HIV epidemic is a development problem that requires a range of responses. The epidemic has its roots in social and economic deprivation and the attitudes, beliefs and values that determine women and men's sexual behaviour. Widespread poverty, low status of women and societal discrimination are the main constraints to responding to the epidemic. India's socio-economic status, traditional social skills, cultural myths on sex and sexuality, and a huge population of marginalised women and men make it extremely vulnerable to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Indeed, the epidemic has already become the most serious public health problem faced by the country since Independence.

Exclusion of women and men with HIV and AIDS and disabilities from mainstream development is caused by their lack of access to decision-making structures and processes such as Panchayati Raj Institutions and Civil Society Organisations' governing bodies and staff. Two reasons for this are institutional and attitudinal discrimination on the one hand, and lack of voice of women and men with HIV and AIDS and disabilities on the other. VSO India's rights-based approach focuses on lack of participation and influence in decision-making of disadvantaged groups.

VSO has decided to move out of our previous geographical focus areas to support the national and state level networks of positive people.

Key beneficiaries and partners

In order to support the disadvantaged groups mentioned above, our key partners are:

- Indian Network of Persons living with HIV & AIDS (INP+) and Positive Women's Network (PWN+) in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
- We work with the State and district level networks like Gujarat State level Network of Persons living with HIV & AIDS (GSNP+), Bengal network of persons living with HIV & AIDS (BNP+) and Orrisa Voluntary Health Association (OVHA).
- We are exploring partnerships with Maharashtra, Haryana, Orrisa, Kerela and Assam state level network of people living with HIV & AIDS.

Key objectives of the programme and cross-cutting themes

- To promote HIV and AIDS as a rights-based issue amongst all VSOI partners and build the capacity of partners to mainstream it as a development issue in their organisations and programmes
- To strengthen the capacity of INP+ and PWN+ (key national partners from the HIV and AIDS movement in India) in organisational and programme development
- To strengthen the capacity of organisations providing care and support needs of women and men living with HIV and AIDS in VSOI's geographical focus areas

VSOI promotes mainstreaming to ensure cross cutting issues have been addressed in a way that contributes to sustainable development. As part of this initiative, it promotes integration of Disability, HIV and AIDS and Participation and Good Governance through volunteer input, advocacy and sensitisation.

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Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements:

- Research advisor supporting research conducted by CINI and developing comprehensive Monitoring & Evaluation guidelines for the organisation.
- Short-term finance advisor
- Organisational Development (e.g. developing a strategy with a partner organisation)
- Fundraising
- Monitoring and evaluation

Workshops, training & conferences:

- Sectoral workshop with volunteers on HIV & AIDS mainstreaming were held and discussions shared with volunteers from governance and disability programmes.
- Advocacy training for VSO South Asia programme teams and key partners
- Ms Rakhi Sarkar (VSO India) and one representative from Positive network attended Toronto Conference

Research:

- Feasibility study to be conducted to identify the gaps and challenges in meeting care & support and treatment needed by women and men living with HIV & AIDS and their family members
- Gendering AIDS research will be conducted

Advocacy and Global Education:

- VSO supports the advocacy work of partners through the full range of VSO interventions including long and short term volunteering, small grants, LINKS exchanges, capacity building training workshops (either organizing VSO-led training or supporting partners to attend external training/ conferences/ seminars) etc. VSO will also use its influence to open doors for partners to engage at national and international advocacy levels, linking partner experiences to the national and international level and vice versa. We will prioritise advocacy capacity-building support for networks of people living with HIV&AIDS and those organisations working on gender and HIV&AIDS.
- Advocacy training workshop for South Asia programme offices and key partners
- Understanding the advocacy initiatives and needs of PWN and INP.
- Encouraging networking and linking to International forums eg. Facilitated participation of GSNP+ member in AIDS Conference in Netherlands to speak on public private partnerships. However there was last minute cancellation as the said member was hospitalized. Such are the challenges of working with the positive people

Partner exchange visits/study tours:

- VSO India has organized an exchange visit for VSO Bangladesh staff and the representatives of their partner organizations (Mukto Akash Bangladesh, Young Power Social Action and Population Services and Training Centre). Visiting six organisations in West Bengal the partner organisations learnt about:
 - Formation of different networks (includes IDUs, MSMs, Sex workers, PLHAs etc) and challenges faced by the networks
 - Strategies devised to overcome the problems
 - Advocacy initiatives undertaken by the networks
 - Decision making/empowerment process in the organization

Providing grants and/or equipment for partners

- Small grants given to GSNP+ for World AIDS Day celebration and capacity building of network members and visioning exercise.
- Supported PWN+ for strengthening State level network, translation of schemes for the persons living with HIV & AIDS in Hindi and capacity building board members.

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- Support to The Deafway Foundation for developing the HIV & AIDS awareness material for the hearing impaired in sign language.
- National Association for Blind (NAB) provided with small grant for preparing accessible HIV & AIDS awareness material in Braille printing and e-text. VSOI is collaborating with (NAB) for printing the HIV & AIDS awareness material in Braille and electronically. This will be shared with all VSO offices and recruitment bases.
- Score Foundation and INP+ supported for airing radio programme with HIV & AIDS messages to reach out to vulnerable groups and visually impaired persons.
- Capacity building through small grants, workshops and placing volunteers. eg. supporting PWN Board member capacity building trainings, and capacity building of Kerela network through providing small grants
- Support BNP+ for developing website
- Small grant provided to PWN+ for awareness raising programme as part of Global AIDS Week of Action

Development of publications or other materials for training or communication

- VSOI is collaborating with National Association for Blind (NAB) for printing the HIV & AIDS awareness material in Braille and electronically. This will be shared with all VSO offices and recruitment bases. Further The Deafway Foundation is developing the HIV & AIDS awareness material for the hearing impaired in sign language. This will be shared with VSO Pakistan, as the sign language is the same as in India.

Other partnership activities

- Partnerships with GSNP+, Exploring partnerships with KNP+, Maharashtra, Andhra, Kerala and Assam networks.
- Feasibility study to assess what role VSO could play in supporting organizations providing care and support.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

Radio programme on disability awareness by Score foundation, an NGO working on visual impairment to include HIV and AIDS messages 3-way partnership with INP+, SCORE and VSO is a step towards initiating mainstreaming. This will be the first step to link the disability and HIV & AIDS movements in India.