

Supporting community action on AIDS in India

## Renewing commitment to the future of the nation

12<sup>th</sup> November, 2010:

*For 34-year old Prerna\* in Tamil Nadu, her happiest moment in the last decade, since she has been living with HIV, has been to see her HIV positive child accepted back amongst his friends in the play ground. From being shunned for almost a year, the efforts of the outreach worker from CHAHA in educating the neighbourhood helped recall him back into the group where he is quite a popular child, now.*

*Krishna Babu\*, a 14-year old boy from Andhra Pradesh, places on record how his life plummeted into the depths of darkness with both parents succumbing to AIDS and he, a conscientious student, being forced to leave*

*school. Also, the pressure of supporting his old grandparents placed him in precarious and unstable part-time jobs. The CHAHA intervention not only altered people's perceptions but got him back into school. He also received a small financial stipend which he gave his grandmother to manage the household.*



*Children from CHAHA celebrating the event with actor-director Nagesh Kukunoor, who was also the chief guest*

These are just a few of the more than 60,000 stories, where intervention from CHAHA has changed the lives of children and their families affected and living with HIV.

India HIV/AIDS Alliance organised a Children's Day event at Hotel Connaught in New Delhi to facilitate interaction between children and families living with and affected by HIV and Government, UN agencies and other NGOs working with children on HIV.

The event was attended by National AIDS Control Organisation, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, United Nations agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO, Clinton Foundation, Family Health International, Lawyer's Collective, press agencies and many other civil society organisations. Mr Nagesh Kukunoor, actor and director, was the chief guest at the event.

The event, organised just before Children's Day, highlighted the story of the affected children and caregivers in their own words - young widows, old grandparents who are now caring for their orphan grandchildren. The key message from the community members stressed on the need for continuation of programmes that provide care and

support services to them. The emphasis was on the need to understand the impact of such programme closures on children and on the HIV response in India, more generally.

The children and caregivers at the event narrated personal stories of living with HIV, their trauma of losing their parents, dropping out of school and what CHAHA means to them. They sang “We Shall Overcome” as a salute to their indomitable spirit. A memorandum of their needs was presented to the National AIDS Control Organisation.

Through this meeting, there was an attempt to understand from the policy makers their plan to address the specific needs of the 64000 children under CHAHA project and many more that haven't still been reached.



*Children from CHAHA programme presenting a memorandum of their needs to E.R. Babu from NACO*

Mr. E.R. Babu from NACO stressed on the importance of scaling up Government's scheme aimed specifically at Children Affected By AIDS (CABA) and committed that all State AIDS Control Societies are motivated to implement this new scheme. It is currently operational in 10 pilot districts. He complemented the children present at the event by saying that each one of you is a role model and we are committed to your education and to your leading a happy and healthy life.

Dr Sonia Trikha from UNICEF stated, *“We believe that parents are the best placed to provide care to children. Therefore prolonging their lives by ensuring their access to treatment is very important. Simultaneously, we need to create an enabling environment where the government, civil society and the community provide support to needy children because it is important that they remain in the community.”*

The meeting ended with an appeal to families, local communities, national governments, NGOs and international institutions to join hands and renew their commitment to children living and affected with HIV and AIDS and provide them the right environment and resources to live with greater dignity and respect.

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