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United Nations Literacy Decade

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

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Programme name: Basic and Functional Literacy and HIV/AIDS prevention

Implemented by: State Resource Center West Bengal, India

Basic facts

Country: India

Starting year: 2005

Outreach: 400 women and 175 adolescent girls

Target Population: female sex workers and their adolescent daughters

Operating in: Kolkata, West Bengal

Main Funding: the Government of India

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Brief Description

The programme, developed by the State Resource Centre West Bengal, India, tries to respond to the most serious dual challenge faced by India, i.e. to achieve a sustainable level of literacy as well as to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. The target group of the programme are illiterate sex workers – women aged 30-45 and her adolescent daughters. The literacy classes organized by the programme are linked with health camps providing discussion sessions on issues like STDs with special emphasis on HIV/AIDS, nutrition, sanitation, immunization, etc., facilitated by medical practitioners with the help of charts, folders, lesson posters and booklets related to the discussion topics. Follow-up courses are organized to strengthen the educational level of the participants. In addition to basic education, the programme provides vocational courses for the adolescent girls, such as nursing helper courses, beautician courses, tailoring courses, etc.

Rationale

The challenge tackled by the programme is to bring a behavioural change in respect of safe and protected sexual practice among high-risk groups in India. The

situation is particularly alarming because basic and functional literacy skills which help develop a positive behavioural change and acquire knowledge about HIV/AIDS and prevention measures are still lacking for a large part of the population and make them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Objectives

The main objectives of the programme are (a) to make the target group functional literate, (b) to develop knowledge about HIV/AIDS and prevention measures and (c) to develop positive attitudes among the adolescent girls.

Conceptual Model and Methodology

The programme starts with organising health check-up camps for the sex workers and their adolescent daughters to ensure a thorough needs assessment. Discussion sessions are moderated by medical practitioners on issues like STDs with special emphasis on HIV/AIDS, nutrition, sanitation, immunization, etc. In parallel, basic and functional literacy classes are held, always based on topics and learning and reading material related to HIV/AIDS prevention, general health care and women empowerment. In order to develop the mental and physical strength of the women and their daughters, courses like Yoga and Karate were introduced for them. In addition, vocational courses, such as nursing helping courses, beautician courses, tailoring courses, etc. are offered to open up alternative income generation ways.

Innovative features

The programme is based on the principle that sustainable awareness raising regarding HIV/AIDS prevention and health care needs to be accompanied by the transmission of basic and functional literacy skills. In addition, both mothers and their adolescent daughters have been chosen as target groups of the programme to start HIV/AIDS prevention at the earliest possible moment, to offer alternative income-generation activities and to prevent the adolescent girls from getting involved in the sex trade. A close contact to the target group allowed designing the programme activities in a way to effectively respond to their most urgent needs.