



## Background

Pakistan National AIDS consortium (PNAC) is the premier non-governmental organization working for the prevention and control of HIV (AIDS) in Pakistan. It is the representative body of more than **350** NGOs from all parts of the country, which are working on different issues related to AIDS.

At present PNAC is implementing “Building-Up Rights-Based Approaches to HIV/AIDS in Pakistan: A National Civil Society Capacity Building Project.” Commonly known as the TAMEER Project ("Tameer" means "to build" in Urdu), the programme aims to radically enhance the capacity of HIV/AIDS NGOs and to help them be effective and enduring partners in public-private sector partnerships fighting HIV/AIDS. This includes enhanced governance, as well as strategic, organisational, technical and project identification and management capabilities, and increased joint planning and coordination. **Tameer Project** is being jointly funded by European Commission (EC) and Department for International Development (DFID) of the British Government.

A major focus of PNAC is advocacy for policy reforms and an enabling environment regarding HIV and AIDS interventions. PNAC also advocates on behalf of vulnerable and marginalized groups, which are at greater risk of being infected with HIV and AIDS and raises their voice at all important decision making and policy forums. PNAC focuses on bringing positive changes in the behavior of masses, to promote safe behaviors and to reduce high risk behaviors through its Behavioral Change Communication Initiatives.

PNAC participated in World Social Forum, which was held in Karachi from March 24<sup>th</sup> to March 29<sup>th</sup>. WSF is the largest forum of its kind in the world, which attracts civil society organization from all over the world, development professionals, activists and general public. PNAC did not only put up a HIV and AIDS Information Post in the forum for all five days but also organized a seminar. The title of the seminar was “HIV and AIDS: Civil society Response”

This was the first time that PNAC took part in any such event. The purpose behind this was in accordance with the aim of PNAC to reduce discrimination and stigma against HIV/AIDS and its patients. This is also an aim of TAMEER project. Utilizing this forum optimally PNAC took a giant leap towards reaching international audience hoping that the future will bring hope for the vulnerable, marginalized and HIV/AIDS infected individuals as representation in an international forum is a step ahead in vocalizing and thus sorting out the issue of HIV and AIDS..

## Significance of World Social Forum

World Social Forum (WSF) is an open meeting space for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences & inter-linking of effective action for groups and movements of civil society, that are opposed to any form of stigma and discrimination and want to promote open and free dialogues on all the issues that effective development and progress. They are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth.

WSF is a world process. All the meetings held as part of the process have an international dimension. Since 2001, WSF meetings and events have been taking place every year in various parts of the world.

The slogan for WSF 2006 is **“Another World is Possible”**. Through this slogan, the Forum comprises speakers, workshops, panels, debates, marches, and cultural events. It provides an open platform for activists and intellectuals alike to discuss different issues and come up with viable and practicable strategies to encounter them.

Over the past five years, WSF has grown into one of the most dynamic and important social events in the world. An open democratic space of debates of ideas, it is utilized as the pillars of the movement along with civil organizations, social and/or humane NGOs and any movement like associative networks committed in actions.

The World Social Forum, according to Chomsky, offers opportunities of unparalleled importance to bring together popular forces from many in varied constituencies from the richer and poor countries alike, to develop constructive alternatives that will defend the overwhelming majority of the world's population from the attack on the fundamental human rights, and to move on to break down illegitimate power concentrations and extend the domains of justice and freedom.

The World Social Forum provides a unique opportunity of advocacy for the rights of the people living with HIV and AIDS and also for the rights of the vulnerable and marginalized.

In Karachi WSF 2006, Karachi (24<sup>th</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> March) no less than 25000 people registered for the event and at least another 50000 visited the event. Social activists from as many as 58 countries participated in the event and it provided a great opportunity to PNAC for disseminating its message not only to a great number of people but also to develop regional and international linkages.

## Reasons for Participation

Reduction of stigma and discrimination and raising the voice of the vulnerable and marginalized to all policy making forums is one of the main objectives and outcomes of TAMERR project.

HIV&AIDS is a relatively new field in Pakistan. The response to the epidemic at all levels has been to slow. Though government and civil society organizations started their interventions in early nineties of the last century, the scale and quality of these interventions remained debatable at the very best. The reasons are not difficult to identify. Lack of reliable epidemiological data, lack of reliable information about the problem itself, lack of access to information, absence of technical expertise to design suitable interventions, deficient technical skills to implement the projects and above all the stigma and discrimination attached with HIV and AIDS made it almost impossible for the interventions to succeed. Practically there has no advocacy at the grass root level for the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS and especially very few have dared to speak for the rights of vulnerable and marginalized.

Right to information is one of the basic human rights and lack of access to basic knowledge and information about HIV and AIDS is one of the contributing factors for increase in high risk behaviors. Moreover easily available information helps in reduction of stigma and discrimination.

WSF is an important occasion for networking and developing linkages with not national but also international organizations, learning from their experience and developing partnerships. Therefore, PNAC took step forward in bringing into notice one of the most threatening and ruinous global issue of HIV and AIDS. PNAC's aim was to reduce the stigma and discrimination attached to HIV and AIDS and ultimately put an end to it which being TAMEER's main goal remained the central concern of PNAC at the forum.

WSF provides an opportunity for increasing the out reach and helps in dissemination of information at large scale to receptive audience. Thus it provides a unique opportunity of developing multi-sectoral alliance against HIV and AIDS. It also provided PNAC staff members, board members and provincial managers an occasion for exposure and awareness on many other global issues.

## Methodology

In January 2006, PNAC requested organizers for participation in the world social forum. PNAC also invited partner organization for collaboration in participation of the event. The partners included included Aahung (Dr. Sikandar Sohani and Nazo Pirzada), IUCP (Dr. Aleem Baig) and HMAP (Dr. Altaf H. Tariq). PNAC formed a four member core team in Islamabad, which coordinated all the activities in the forum. The Sindh office played a very active role in the organization and activities carried out in the forum. Four members Mr. Amir, Ms. Asma, Ms. Ayella, and Mr. Irshad Junejo from Sindh office put in a lot of effort in the organization of the event The team did not only coordinate with organizers of the forum but also collaborated with other civil society partners for joint activities in the forum.

The core team ensured registration of organization and representatives as well as confirmation of the venue for Information Post and Seminar.

Special bulletins, brochures, fact sheets and souvenir for distribution on the Information post as well as during the seminar, were developed. The Information Post was managed by professional staff members from Islamabad and Sindh office for the entire duration of the seminar.

The team also coordinated with other partners and developed mechanisms for their participation and sharing of material developed by those organizations on the information post.

A theatre group was engaged for performing during the seminar. The theme of the performance was discussed in details with the group through Aahung. The logistics were finalized with the group by 24<sup>th</sup> March. Many rehearsals the performance were carried out before the final performance, not only to ensure smooth performance but also to ensure that the message which was being delivered was in no way against right based approach and that it also helped in reduction of stigma and discrimination rather than contributing to it.

Prominent experts were identified for seminar during WSF, two were international experts, one from Bangladesh Mr. Mizan-ur-Rehamn and the other from Kenya (James Kamu) who himself was HIV positive and their participation was confirmed. The representatives of the civil society in Pakistan who are actively involved in grass root interventions were identified and invited to participate in the event.

## PNAC Activities in WSF

In order to increase out reach, develop linkages and partnerships, dissemination of knowledge and information for better and effective advocacy for HIV and AIDS PNAC participated in the WSF Karachi and used the occasion for raising the voice of marginalized for creation of an open society and an enabling environment for HIV and AIDS interventions.

The focus of the activities was on reduction of stigma and discrimination and how it could be controlled through providing correct information to the people. All PNAC activities during the forum were targeted towards reduction of stigma and discrimination related with HIV and AIDS and promotion of safe behaviors.



PNAC banners were hung at all prominent places in KMC complex where WSF was taking place. These banners attracted the attention of all the visitors. Different messages were printed on the banners and reminded the visitors of the need to take the threat of epidemic more seriously and of adopting safe behaviors.

### **HIV and AIDS Information Post**

PNAC established an HIV and AIDS Information Post for the entire duration of the forum. The stall worked for all five days and served as a point of getting any information about HIV and AIDS. The Information point was managed by professional staff, which not only distributed IEC material but also provided information about HIV and AIDS situation in Pakistan. Many interesting and interactive programs were initiated on the Post for attracting the attention of the visitors and dissemination of information.



Special Bulletin and posters were designed and published for WSF and were distributed at the PNAC Information Post. Fact sheets about the present situation of HIV and AIDS in Pakistan and the factors responsible for the spread were also printed for the occasion. The visitors of the Information Post showed keen interest in the publications and



thousands of the publications were distributed among the participants of the forum. The posters were specially liked by the foreign delegates visiting WSF and they requested for extra copies to take back with them.

1500 copies of Special Bulletin, 2000 copies of fact sheets, 1000 copies of PNAC monthly bulletin and 1500 posters were distributed from the HIV and AIDS Information Post.

Special videos regarding HIV and AIDS prevention and cure were constantly played on TV on the post and not only enhanced the interest of the visitors but also provided valuable information.

For one day PNAC shared the Information Post with the team from Aahung. The IEC material prepared by Aahung on Sexual and Reproductive Health was displayed on the Information Post. The visitors also showed keen interest in the material and all the copies were taken away in just one day.

## Seminar

On 26<sup>th</sup> of March a seminar was arranged on the topic:” HIV and AIDS: Civil society Response”. The seminar highlighted the issue in communicating reliable and correct information about HIV and AIDS in easy to comprehend way in vocabulary which is not only exact and precise but is also in accordance with our social norms and values.



PNAC welcomed the participants of the seminar for their lending time for participation. The seminar started with the interview of group of transgender persons, which had come from the Kasur City (HMAP). The representatives of the group discussed not only their problems but also the issue of stigma and discrimination faced by them. They also shared with the participants the different strategies adopted by them in the projects to increase participation of other group members in their project.

After the interview a theater performance by local theater group reflected on the problems being faced by the people living with HIV and AIDS in Pakistan and the issues



associated with them. The performers had come from Dadu, which is a city in interior Sindh. All the performers were young students and social activists. The performance, which was in two parts, was immensely liked by all those present.

President PNAC Raja Khalid Mehmood introduced the participants with PNAC, its working and with the

objectives of the seminar. He informed that the seminar was an attempt of sharing the experience of civil society organizations working in different countries of the regions so that they can learn from each others experience and develop better strategies for the future interventions.

Mezan-ur-Rehman from Bangladesh STD/AIDS Alliance and James Kamu from Kenya were among the prominent speakers of the seminar. Both of them shared experience of their countries in preventions and control of HIV and AIDS. They also gave a situational analysis of HIV and AIDS in their respective countries. James Kamu, who is himself a HIV positive person, emphasized the importance of reduction of stigma and discriminations attached with them. Need for developing international regional alliances was also emphasized.



Other important speakers of the seminar included Dr. Altaf H. Tariq, Dr, Haji Hanif, Dr. Aleem Baig, Dr. Farukh from CONCERN, Pervaiz Mohabat and Saima Gul from Quetta. All of them shared and discussed the experience of their respective interventions and suggested ways and means of making the civil society response more effective and powerful.

In the end Qadeer Baig National Manager summed up the recommendations of the speakers,, which were:

- Need for increased efforts for Reduction of Stigma and Discrimination
- Establishment of Regional and International alliances for exchange of experience and learning regarding HIV and AIDS interventions
- Enhanced Role of Media in disseminating authentic ad reliable information about HIV and AIDS
- Creation of an enabling environment for civil society organizations which are working for the prevention and control of HIV and AIDS

- Recognition of contribution of Civil Society Organizations in controlling HIV and AIDS

The seminar was attended by a large number of people including delegates from many countries. The effort was appreciated by all and is expected to result in development of international linkages by PNAC.



## Outcomes/Learning

### Bridging of Information Gap

Better understanding of the issue and greater interest in development of strategies for its prevention and control

Increased awareness among young people from universities and colleges, who visited the WSF

WSF was attended by at least 25,000 people from all walks of life and from all over the world including development professionals, journalists, health professionals, intellectuals and general public. Thus the message reached a large number of people.

The seminar was attended by 150 people, who took part in productive dialogue about civil society Response to HIV and AIDS in Pakistan and came up with valuable suggestions and recommendations for improving the efficiency of the response.

Linkages with national and international organizations

Development of partnerships with experienced civil society organizations from other countries.

Enhanced profile of PNAC

## Challenges

The organization of the participation in the World Social Forum was not without challenges and problems, which had to be overcome and solved.

The organizations which were responsible for organizing the event did not have the experience and skill of organizing such a huge event on a very large scale. As it was the first time for them as well. There were many coordination issues. PNAC had to face confirmation problems, after submitting the dues for stall, seminar and participants. PNAC got confirmation after many reminders and requests.

After reaching Karachi, PNAC team had to face a lot of problems as well. There was a complete lack of coordination. No body had any idea about registration, location and dates of seminars and the location of stalls. PNAC team got a place for the stall after a lot of hassle. The online confirmation proved quite futile as the organizers in Karachi did not know any thing about it and they had no information about the organizations, which had submitted the dues on line. Even the process of getting cards for the participants proved quite cumbersome. The organizers' attitude was not also accommodating. Perhaps, next time it would be good idea to select educated and skilled persons for organizing the event.

The issue of security during the forum also remained a question mark. Though people were being checked at the entrance and in this regard no unpleasant incident took place, yet the security of the stalls and other places inside the arena remained suspect.

Eighteen Panaflex banners of PNAC were stolen on the last night of the seminar. When PNAC representatives tried to register complaints, they were informed that there was no mechanism of doing so. Nobody was there to take the responsibility. PNAC was informed that there was no security system during the nights and organizations were themselves supposed to take care of their belongings. No body informed the participants about this before hand.