

ACFID and GIPA

It is timely after the XV International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, to remind ourselves that the HIV epidemic in the Asia Pacific region is getting much worse. Both India and China are at a turning point. There are already large epidemics in Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand and PNG. This is our backyard, and we as Australian NGO's will certainly be getting more involved.

Many ACFID members are already doing good work in HIV in Africa and the Asia Pacific region. It is clear that those agencies will become even more involved in HIV work, and that many agencies not already involved, will become involved. It is worth drawing your attention to the AusAID strategy "Meeting the Challenge" launched in July 2004 in Bangkok. It is quite clear from this strategy that AusAID is making HIV a priority, and that it will be included as a component in all AusAID country strategies.

In that light I want to talk about the GIPA Principles, the greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS. These principles were developed after the 1994 AIDS summit in Paris, and 42 countries including Australia were signatories to them. They say that there should be the **full involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in all levels of the response to HIV**, including decision making processes; promotion and protection of human rights; supporting and strengthening PLWHA networks; and true partnerships with PLWHA.

As a person living with HIV since 1980, I can attest to the fact that these principles are far from being a reality. In most countries in the region PLWHA continue to suffer widespread stigma and discrimination, human rights violations, abuse and denial of access to health services and treatment, let alone being involved in planning responses which are supposed to address their needs. Even in Australia it has in the past been an uphill battle for us positive people to have our voice heard in some quarters, and to be included as true partners in the HIV/AIDS response, especially internationally.

I want to encourage you to involve PLWHA in two areas. Firstly in the planning of your HIV international programs both in Australia and overseas. Secondly to involve PLWHA as true and equal partners in the implementation of your programs overseas. This might mean both employing positive people in your overseas projects, and working closely with the PLWHA groups that are slowly emerging throughout the region, and who are all in such desperate need of technical assistance and support.

Finally let me draw your attention to the Code of Good Practice for NGO's responding to HIV/AIDS, developed by 12 leading international NGO's and coordinated by IFRC in Geneva. The final Code is due for release on October 9th 2004. This Code, much like the AusAID strategy, integrates GIPA principles in its essence. I would like to think that many ACFID members will be signatories to this Code.

The National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) would be pleased to provide further information and contacts in assisting you in the implementation of GIPA Principles in your work.

Apart from being the Chair of AFAP, I am also the International Portfolio Convenor of NAPWA, and can be contacted on 02 9665 9127 or by email at johnrock@bigfoot.com.

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