

Reaching out through the Internet

Solution Exchange is a knowledge sharing initiative that uses an e-mail platform to offer a free, impartial space for communities of development practitioners.



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"Every individual's knowledge adds a new dimension and offers a fresh perspective on development challenges. Your contribution matters in ushering in 'the change'."

'e' aiding HIV/AIDS

The National AIDS Control Organisation, NACO is charged with managing the Government of India's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic through a Nationwide AIDS Control Programme (NACP). The Programme's overall objective is to reduce the spread of HIV infection and to strengthen the capacity of Central and State Governments, civil society and the private sector to respond to AIDS on a long-term basis. The first phase of NACP-I began in 1992. NACP-II began in 1999, and NACP-III is scheduled to begin in April 2006. NACO began organising the NACP-III preparation process in late 2004, setting up a planning team of specialists and creating working groups to address the various implementation and management issues.

At about the same time, the United Nations Agencies represented in India, were introducing a new concept, 'Solution Exchange'. Solution Exchange is a knowledge sharing initiative that uses an e-mail platform to offer a free, impartial space for communities of development practitioners to share their knowledge and experiences. Members represent a wide range of organisations and perspectives from government, NGOs, development partners, private sector, and academia and are organised into Communities of Practice, built around the framework of the Millennium Development Goals as they relate to national goals and targets. Through Solution Exchange, community members interact on an ongoing basis, building

familiarity and trust, gaining in knowledge that helps them contribute more effectively to development challenges. Each community has a dedicated team of professionals to moderate the discussions.

Solution Exchange foresaw support for development practitioners concerned with AIDS in India. The service would be hosted by UNAIDS as the secretariat to the 'UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS'. Taking advantage of this opportunity to reach out through a UN-sponsored platform, NACO



requested UNAIDS to support civil society consultation through an e-Discussion on NACP III and UNAIDS offered Solution Exchange as a platform to seek the views of the general public to contribute their insights into the working groups.

The NACP-III e-Consultation was launched on 19 July 2005 by Dr. S.Y. Quraishi, Director General of the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO). Members were asked to respond on pre-selected thirteen different topics, like prevention, focused interventions, communication/advocacy, human rights and mainstreaming/partnerships, etc.

Rural India Achieving Millennium Development Goals and Grassroots Development

The International Conference on 'Rural India Achieving Millennium Development Goals and Grassroots Development' was held in the campus of the well-known Dr. Marri Chenna Reddy HRD Institute, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh, India) during 10-12 November 2005.

The conference was inaugurated on 10th November 2005 by Shri N Raghuvendra Reddy, Minister for Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh, who also released the Souvenir. Prof. I. V. Murali Krishna, President of the Local Chapter of Bhoovigyan Vikas Foundation welcomed the gathering. The inaugural session was followed by two technical sessions on 'MDGs and Targets: Vision and Action' and 'Grassroots Level Governance and Panchayati Raj Institutions'.

The deliberations on the second day was mainly focused on the State of Andhra Pradesh with particular reference to the progress achieved on the MDGs. It consisted of four technical sessions on 'Food Security and Hunger', 'Health Issues', 'Gender', and 'Creation of Adasha Villages'. This was preceded by a plenary lecture by Dr. S. Mahendra Dev, Director CESS, Hyderabad.

The deliberations on the third day took place in four technical sessions and five Plenary Lecture Sessions. The Themes covered in the plenary lectures were various development issues relevant to 'rural India'. The plenary session was chaired by Dr. M. V. Rajasekharan, Hon'ble Minister for State for Planning, Planning Commission, Government of India. The Valedictory Session was chaired by Hon'ble Shri Ponnala Lakshmaiah, Minister for Major Irrigation, Govt. of A.P, with Dr. K Rajagopal, Vice Chancellor, JNTU, as the Chief Guest. The Bhoovigyan Sammans were presented to 12 distinguished professionals in different disciplines, besides two posthumous awards.

The complete report of the conference is available at <http://www.sahanav.org/ruralindia/sessionsummary.htm>



Credit: <http://www.sahanav.org>

The AIDS Community moderator posted the individual contributions via email as they were received from members. Every week a summary of all the received contributions was prepared, sent to the NACP- III planning team and circulated through the e-Consultation.

e-Consultation for solution

Over the three months of the e-Consultation, eight hundred persons subscribed to the discussions, from all over India and abroad. Over three hundred constructive and valuable contributions were offered to the working groups, and the responses were well reflected in the corresponding draft reports. The e-Consultation also encouraged anonymous mails to ensure all voices were heard. The trust of the members in the process is evident - the e-Consultation received only eight anonymous postings.

To make the process fully transparent, impartial and more participative, the minutes of the various working group meetings were also posted, and feedback received from the members were shared with the working groups for incorporation into the final reports. This was followed by posting of the working group draft reports. The finalised reports of the working groups were shared with the members of the NACP-III e-Consultation.

Echoing the excitement and interest generated in this pioneering effort, the e-Consultation received substantial press coverage, with headlines reading 'You can help make AIDS policy' (Asian Age, New Delhi), 'e-Consultation to help the Government of India design its national AIDS policy' (i4donline.com), etc.

Through this e-Consultation, the Indian Government has set an example for other countries, by seeking direct participation of the people at large in its efforts to design a National AIDS Control Programme. By capturing as wide a range of perspectives as possible, including those living with HIV/AIDS, the resulting programme will have a much better chance of meeting its goals and mitigating the spread of AIDS in India.

The way forward

Quote of a member participating in the e-Consultation may focus the view of the members of Solution Exchange: "I am seeing the slew of mails, working groups working hard, consultations and I am asking myself if this is the same NACO which planned NACP II? I am aware that any amount of open consultation will still bring in criticism but the space given for discussion for preparation of NACP III is one of the best I have seen so far. Really appreciate this..."

NACP-III is currently being finalised, and the inputs to the e-Consultation have been incorporated into the draft version. The Solution Exchange for the AIDS Community in India has moved on to knowledge-sharing activities and other efforts intended to help ensure that members work more effectively both individually and as a group. Thus, through this UN initiative, the power and passion of Communities of Practice is being channeled into a cost-effective way of attaining this MDG goal. ■

For more information about Solution Exchange visit www.solutionexchange-un.net.in