

### CASE STUDY

The Gujarat State Network of Positive People (GSNP+) set out to learn more about the employment needs of people living with HIV and identified 341 individuals in need of work from among the network's members. GSNP+ and ICRW also surveyed 357 workers across five sectors and found high levels of stigma toward PLHIV, which would impede them from seeking or retaining employment. For instance, 42% of workers reported that people talk 'badly' about PLHIV at the workplace and the same percentage felt that a person living with HIV should not be allowed to continue working. Additionally, most workplaces lacked PLHIV anti-discrimination policies.

In order to create a supportive and non-discriminatory work environment for PLHIV, GSNP+ recognized the need to address the drivers and facilitators of stigma among more than one population/ environment, specifically both workers (general population) and institutions (senior management and policies). This project was part of a larger effort to adapt and pilot test a global stigma-reduction framework to the Indian context.<sup>1</sup>

### Implementation

#### Gaining entry

To foster the hiring of PLHIV and to combat stigma in the workplace, GSNP+ first approached 84 businesses, requesting a face-to-face meeting. They received a poor response – few agreed to meet a GSNP+ representative, mainly because of denial that there was any HIV-related problem. According to one manager, "We do not have HIV-positive staff in our industry."

GSNP+ changed its strategy and met with representatives of the five largest industry associations in Surat:

- Surat Diamond Association (SDA)
- Federation of Gujarat Weavers Association (FOGWA)
- Southern Gujarat Hotel and Restaurant Association (SHARA)
- Surat Builder Association, a subgroup of the Confederation of Real Estate Developers of India (CREDAI)
- South Gujarat Chamber of Commerce

At these meetings, GSNP+ dispelled myths about HIV, convinced association leadership of the value of PLHIV in the workforce and of support to sensitize bigger industrial houses towards HIV.

#### Conducting sensitization trainings

The five associations together provided the names of 200 companies and helped mobilize participation of representatives from within their own sectors for a sensitization meeting on the importance of a stigma-free workplace. Based on the outcomes of this workshop and on interest shown by individual companies, GSNP+ worked closely with 11 of these companies, holding sensitization trainings for senior leadership as well as for a total of 400 workers.

### Project highlights

- The study gained buy-in from five industrial associations in the city of Surat to promote the employment of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and create an enabling environment among member businesses.
- 341 people living with HIV were identified as needing employment in Surat.
- 357 workers were surveyed on HIV knowledge and stigma-related attitudes.
- HIV and stigma sensitization trainings were held with senior leadership and 400 workers from 11 business houses.
- Seven workplace policies were developed to support the rights of PLHIV and create an enabling environment for their employment.

Key topics covered during the trainings were:

- Basic information about of HIV and AIDS
- HIV prevention and risk reduction
- HIV and AIDS at the workplace
- Stigma and discrimination at the work place
- HIV testing
- Care, support and treatment for people living with HIV
- Contact strategies – engaging directly with PLHIV – proved to be an important part of the trainings. Participation by PLHIV dispelled the strongly held misconception that they are weak and unable to work.



1. ICRW, UNDP and STRIVE, 2013. A global HIV stigma reduction framework adapted and implemented in five settings in India. 2013. Summary Report. ICRW.

**//** I never knew that an AIDS patient could appear so healthy. Looking at you, it does not even seem that you are ill.”

TRAINING PARTICIPANT AFTER HEARING AN HIV POSITIVE SPEAKER



## Changing workplace policies and practices

GSNP+ supported seven companies/business houses to update their human resource (HR) policies to protect the rights of PLHIV, using the workplace policy developed by the International Labour Organization as the basis. Meetings were held with individual companies to sensitize them on subjects such as PLHIV needs and the value of PLHIV in the workforce. Engaging with the business houses in this way helped in mobilizing participation in sensitization training, with the result that 400 staff members from these 11 companies, including HR departments, were sensitized on HIV-related stigma and discrimination as well as PLHIV issues. GSNP+ also worked with the corporate social responsibility (CSR) teams to identify ways in which the companies could support PLHIV in the workplace.

## Key outcomes

- Greater support for working together on generating employment for PLHIV.
- Seven companies updated their HR policies in line with those recommended by the International Labour Organization.
- Three companies are now supporting care and support for PLHIV using Corporate Social Responsibility funds.
- The project was show-cased by three media organizations, covering TV, radio and print.

## Lessons learned

- Gain the support of gatekeeper organizations first; in this case, the industry associations.
- Engage the associations directly in outreach efforts.
- With individual companies, sensitize management first and then work with individuals in the workforce.
- Allow sufficient time to gain entry to workplaces. It can be a slow process, yet can lead to long-term support.

**//** In our hotel industry there is a lot of employee turnover. In such cases, we could think of getting the unemployed PLHIV into the stream.”

PRESIDENT, HOTEL ASSOCIATION, SURAT

**//** We can organise certified training programmes on the skills to be acquired in the construction business especially for PLHIV. This will aid them in seeking jobs in the civil construction sector.”

HR MANAGER, RAJHANS GROUP



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