



## Children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS: Summary of a meeting to explore key policy issues in India 10<sup>th</sup> September 2004

The India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) hosted a meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September in Delhi to improve understanding and facilitate dialogue about policies related to children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS in India. Alliance India and MAMTA outlined the national policy review they are undertaking, and the meeting also provided an opportunity to map the policy priorities and future plans of key stakeholders in relation to children and HIV/AIDS. Participants at the meeting included MAMTA, Save the Children UK, Family Health International, Project Concern International, Lawyers Collective, Delhi Network of Positive People, USAID and UNICEF.

The meeting discussed the following key points:

- At present, there are no national policies addressing the special impact HIV/AIDS has on children. The National Commission on Children has been tasked with developing a policy for orphans and vulnerable children as part of the commitments made at the HIV/AIDS and Children's UNGASS meetings. A **national plan of action** for children affected by HIV/AIDS would be even more valuable.
- The need to improve **linkages** with government, both at national and state levels.
- There is a need to engage in the "orphanages debate" - institutions are still perceived by some NGOs as the best option for orphans, rather than as a last resort. Dialogue and discussion needs to be maintained about the effectiveness and validity of **community-based care**.
- Children are a "**disempowered** group" within Indian society, with girls even more marginalised than boys. This has an impact on their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS - for example, children under 18 are not allowed to get tested for HIV unless accompanied by an adult, and there are very few child-friendly sexual health services.
- The need for children affected by HIV/AIDS to have **access to education**, and for the education to be of a high quality. Access is as important as quality.
- HIV/AIDS should not be the factor that determines support at programme level, instead the range of **integrated factors** that lead to **vulnerability** should be considered as primary determinants. The need for clarity about the focus of support, and how to identify children and families who require support.
- The group raised concerns about access to **anti-retroviral treatment for children**, including the need for Indian guidelines for the management of paediatric HIV.
- **Participation** of children and also of people living with HIV/AIDS who identify issues of concern to them, such as inheritance, property rights of their children and planning for their children's future.

### Conclusion:

It was agreed that an informal working group should be formed for continued discussions about policy issues related to children and HIV/AIDS. This group will meet quarterly, with the intention of focusing discussions on specific policy themes. The group will also communicate electronically. UNICEF offered to connect the group to the relevant government officials. It was agreed that Alliance India would host the next meeting.

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