

# AID Conference 2004

## *Minutes for Session Named Women Cell*

Vaijayanti began the session on the AID Women's cell, which currently has approximately 100 members. It focuses on how the Women's Cell can actively assist the HBP. To a survey which asked for responses to the latter 30% responded of which most felt that work from other cells (Gujarat cell, Rajasthan cell, etc) needs to be incorporated.

The AID Women's Cell was created to explore issues that women are faced with, such as dowry. The pledge against dowry was a focal point and still is one, for which a campaign called "Poore Nagrik Poore Haq" is going on in northern India.

Aravinda spoke on how dowry is affecting us and that we should assess the information we already have in terms of population and family planning and how motivated the women are towards these issues.

To further the discussion, Padmapriya suggested we use the existing framework to follow Aravinda's suggestion. Visiting the project sites, getting information on savings, and measuring the tangible and intangible metrics were just some of the options raised.

One common problem is when people call for block coordination, they are hesitant when talking about the problem since the block coordinator is a woman. Therefore, it was suggested that more women become active in HBP. The Women's Cell has kicked off the certificate program, thanks to Gayathri of AID- Austin and there is more talk with the block coordinators. When Padmapriya visited the block, she saw they were circulating a magazine that had lots of information on women. The most important thing is documentation for it is something that could still use drastic improvements.

The discussion transitioned into one of microcredit. The loans are internally generated, but in a significant number of cases, the woman doesn't even know how the loan is being used. 22% women said they took the loan but didn't know how it was being used. So, the interesting case of the rest is, the woman might know how the loan has been used but the whole process for which it has been used might not be under her control. For example, the husband uses the loan for his shop. Certain cases are there where the women say that they are more educated than husbands and hence control it.

Accountability is maintained through regular meetings and proofs like showing the passbook etc. There is continuous supervision and training too. Vaijayanti said, it's amazing that even if the woman is highly educated and working as, say software engineer, the power dynamics is still the same.

Chakri pursued to talk about the HIV/AIDS cell. He pointed out that women have a greater risk to exposure than male. Hence there is a higher chance that male can infect a female. Economic, social, legal and cultural discrimination drive this epidemic among women. More than 40% of NEW HIV infections occur among women globally. Mostly through sexual transmission. In India, where 4.58 million adults are infected, up to 46% of individuals living with HIV/AIDS are women.

He then posed the following questions: How can a married woman be at risk? When does transmission from mother to child occur? Why should the population control be the responsibility of woman? Some recommendations for AID are reproductive health discussions with Self Help Groups, counseling for sexual health, STIs, involving men in discussions, providing information on infant feeding etc.

Vaijayanti concluded the session by discussing ASHA's similar work through a program called ASHA SANCTUARY. AID is funding a project on HIV called Manavya.