



# Identifying and raising advocacy issues through women led task forces in Nepal

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## Introduction

HIV positive single women face a difficult existence as they not only have to struggle to earn a livelihood but also battle stigma and discrimination at community and also within the family. Due to their poor socio economic conditions and lack of available facilities these women are unable to access to health services and receive proper treatment. There are very few service delivery points to get access to treatment care and support. Women are poorly equipped and are the sole breadwinner for an extended family following their husbands' death. Achham and Kanchanpur districts in Nepal follows significant numbers of people living with HIV (PLHIV) (n=1700).

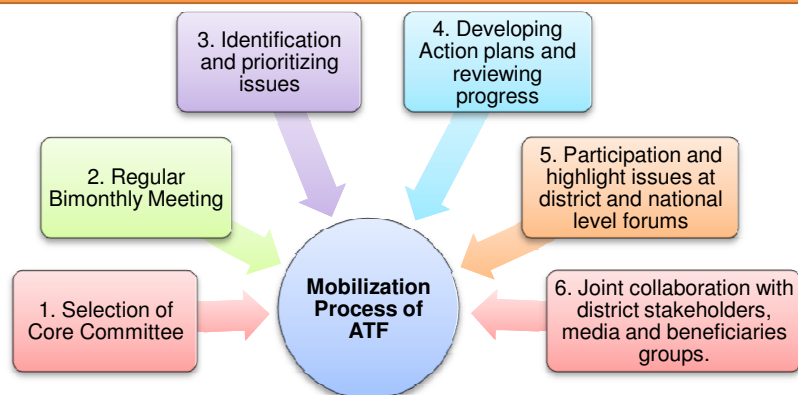
EMPHASIS supported formation of Advocacy Task Force (ATF) is a key initiatives of the project. ATF is a mechanism through which project is raising the issues of infected and affected with the wider stakeholders attempting to explore and access resources and to fight with the discrimination. The ATF is led by HIV positive single women and comprises of district level representatives from government, NGOs and community leaders. There are two officially registered women led ATFs with 30 executive members covering almost 500 PLHIV women.

## Project and Activities

EMPHASIS (Enhancing mobile populations' access to HIV and AIDS services, information and support ) is a 5-year (3 Aug 2009-2 Aug 2014) initiative funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the largest distributor of Lottery good cause funding in the United Kingdom, implemented by CARE and local NGO partners in Nepal, India and Bangladesh. The program aims to reduce the vulnerability of key mobile populations to HIV and AIDS along two mobility routes between Nepal/India and Bangladesh India by delivering focused interventions at source, transit and destination.

One of the objectives of EMPHASIS is "to develop evidence based advocacy for creating enabling environment for reducing vulnerabilities of mobile populations to HIV & AIDS". For this purpose, EMPHASIS has formed Advocacy Task Forces in Achham and Kanchanpur districts of Nepal. The ATF consistently engage local leaders, media, various stakeholders, mobilizes community groups and builds capacity of the locals. ATF is capacitated by organizing trainings. The ATF aims to lobby and knock at the national doors to attract attention of policy makers to support PLHIVs in order to gain a political and financial commitment to support for resources.

## Materials and Methods



## Results

ATF successes on securing funding of Rs 7 Lakhs (USD 7000 approx) from the local administration during District Planning Assembly, received commitment from government agencies and political cadres for different care and support services for PLHIVs. There is a tangible decrease in stigma and discrimination where PLHIVs are feeling more comfortable being part of their communities working as Peer Educators. Regular advocacy supported in subsidization of travel rate to PLHIV in Achham by transport association. They participated in National level AIDS conference in 2013 sharing the situation of HIV infected and affected women and children. Their engagement in preparation of district advocacy strategy / plan in the district as well as regional level is acting as a moderator. They strongly negotiate with concerned government departments for implementation of policies and larger coverage of Voluntary Counseling Testing services, care and support services to poor, vulnerable and socially excluded groups, especially for infected and affected women and children. Today, ATF is bringing all the stakeholders on a common platform to discuss and resolve issues, generating support for livelihood, raise issues at local district administration on budget allocation, mass rally and campaigns against violence and discrimination and advocacy to access to services.



Mrs. Mathura Kunwar, Chairperson of ATF in National AIDS conference



Members engaged in discussion during Bimonthly meeting in Achham

## Conclusion

Advocacy Task Forces play significant role in collecting issues related to HIV and AIDS from the community and provide input in issues prioritization and generating resources for support through advocacy. With a bit of initiation and support, PLHIV women can advocate their issues on their own. Similar types of taskforces can be replicated using EMPHASIS experience. Regular training and support is needed to ensure the long run functionality of such enterprises.