

▼ Exposé AIDS IN INDIA

12.09.05

## AIDS IN INDIA

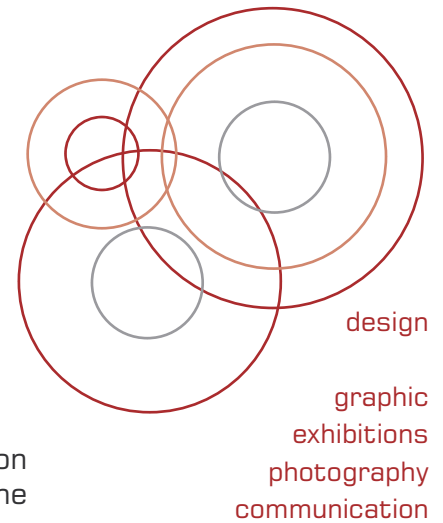
a non-profit photographic project on HIV,  
by Dirk Gebhardt and David Klammer

While western media are still writing about the African AIDS tragedy, an new and more powerful crisis is on the rise in India. The virus already holds the Indian nation in a tight grip. From big cities to small villages in the country side. And even more, the expectation are, that India will be hit much harder by AIDS in the next few years, than most of the African countries.

2003 had seen 520,000 new infections in India, the Health Ministry said there were just 28,000 in 2004. According to the official count, India has 5.13 million HIV/AIDS sufferers, while the U.N.'s estimate is up to 8.5 million. The Naz Foundation, a New Delhi-based AIDS charity, says the real figure may be closer to 15 million. The predictions by the U.S.'s Central Intelligence Agency is that the number of Indians infected with HIV and AIDS would top 20 million to 25 million by 2010.

AIDS in India is spread mainly by truck-drivers, who get infected on the road-side by prostitutes and other sexual relations, then give on the virus to their families. The sex-traffic of Nepalese girls across the border to the big brothels in Mumbai, Delhi or Kolkata, supports the spread of HIV.

AIDS experts regard India's social constraints as a key reason the country hasn't yet seen infections reach the rates witnessed in Africa. But prudishness is also a liability. Two years ago, for example, India's former Health Minister pulled condom ads from state TV for indecency. While AIDS campaigners receive public money (albeit tiny sums), they have also been attacked by mobs and arrested by police. Half of India's parents marry off their daughters before they are 18, but almost none will tell them the facts of life.



**B**ut there are successful examples, that show the situation isn't completely hopeless. There are some people in the country, who fight the ignorance.

**Putul Singh**, Union coordinator of the DMSC, Kolkata. Putul Singh is now a sex worker by night and activist by day. She calls AIDS her „friend,“ because, she says, „before the project no one cared if we were healthy or not. After stemming the flow of AIDS among our sisters, we want to spread the message to ordinary people too.“

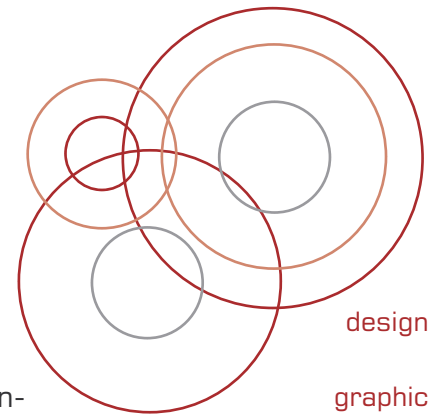
In recent years, public health officials, social workers, and politicians swarmed Kolkata's red-light areas, advocating safe sex, offering medical services, and distributing condoms. These campaigns resulted in tremendously successful initiatives like the Sonagachi AIDS Project, which went from being a quasi-governmental program to one of the largest community-run intervention projects in the world. Sex workers themselves now run the show, and in Sonagachi, famous as the oldest, largest, and most storied red-light district in the city, only 9 percent of about 6000 sex workers are HIV positive. In comparison, rates of infection among Mumbai (formerly Bombay) prostitutes as of 1997 were as high as 70 percent.

**Arulanandam Elango SJ**, (Darsi) head of the Catholic Mission in Darsi, in the Prakasam district, State of Andhra Pradesh, launched the AIDS awareness campaign in September 2002 as a response to the situation, where every village has an average of five AIDS cases.

Following one of his ideas, children are becoming powerful and effective teachers to villagers. A 16-member theatre group of boys and girls introduces the programme, by saying that there is no treatment for the illness and that prevention is the only cure. Their play goes on to explain facts about AIDS and the precautions that need to be taken.

„People in this area commit suicide when they get to know they have contracted AIDS, and I plead with all so that such people may live,“ said Kunda Deepthi, 10, who is in the group.

The play then portrays a dramatic sequence about the social boycott of a little girl who has fallen victim to the disease. The children involved in the programme come from St Xavier's orphanage, which welcomes 186 children in Darsi, a town of the district. The programme is a joint venture by the students of the local Jesuit school and a couple of Hindu doctors.



design

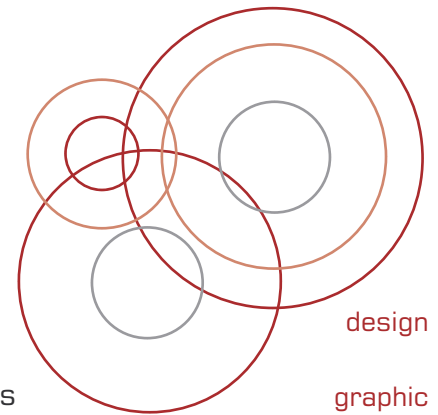
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**Dr. Manorama** from CHES Supports Orphans with AIDS and infected Women. When Dr. Manorama decided to open her home to two HIV-infected orphans some years ago, she set in motion a series of events that would establish CHES as a care-giver for HIV/AIDS infected persons. The Community Health Education Society (CHES) is a Chennai -based NGO that offers refuge and solace to HIV/AIDS patients in general and infected women in particular. The Ashram was CHES's initial project and was started as a home for AIDS orphans. Over the years, the Ashram also became a place of refuge for CSWs. Many have left the sex trade and work as care-givers at CHES. Caring for HIV/AIDS patients involves an approach that must minister to their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs.

**Dr. Satish Bhuthaieh** of Samuha Samraksha (Bangalore) holds a weekly clinic in the village of Kustigi in a shack with two attached dormitories—one for women, one for men—that are reserved for the dying. That the disease has long crossed over into the general population is apparent from the 300 people — grandmothers, truckers, brides, migrants, prostitutes, child and toddlers—outside his door. Samuha director Dr. Iyengar says HIV was spread by more than the mere mobility of truckers and migrants. “Most married men have multiple partners,” she says. “And women quite often have a steady stand-in partner, or more than one, for when their husband goes away.” Koppal is a testament to the dangers of denial. “When the first cases started appearing, the government said: ‘AIDS is not an issue in India. This is a foreign thing. Condoms only promote promiscuity.’ Today, every single village in Koppal knows it’s an issue. There’s no one untouched by HIV. And that’s because none of those cherished ideas about sex and fidelity apply.” Asked how far ahead Koppal is of the rest of India, Iyengar replies: “Five years.”

**Humsafar Trust** (Mumbai) is a male sexual health NGO, with a focus on homosexual men and men who have sex with men (MSM). The foundation is India`s first pilot project on motivating behaviour change among MSM. The Trust has a STI clinic and Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center (VCTC) equipped with up to date medical and clinical equipment to diagnose and treat anal, oral STIs and test for HIV. A trained in-house counsellor offers pre and post-test counselling. These facilities are funded by grants from the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO)

▶ [www.dwork.de](http://www.dwork.de)



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**O**ur non-profit photographic project on AIDS IN INDIA, focus on the infectious paths of the illness and on projects, like those mentioned above, who try to find a way out of the coming crisis. The main aim is to create an educational exposition, that show's by the power of images and text, the way HIV took hold and will take of India.

We want this exposition to be shown across the indian sub-continent, to inform the people about AIDS and some possible ways-out. The exposition will be produced in a copy of ten each of them, packed in a crate, light and easy to transport and mount. Any Organisation, Institution and Associations, that deals with AIDS, HIV and its related Problems should have free access to it. There for we need Indian partners, who can administrate the exposition in India.

**D**avid Klammer and Dirk Gebhardt are both international awarded photo journalist. Working worldwide on social issues. David Klammer has already extensively worked with his camera in India. For example at the red-light-districts of Mumbai, when he worked on a project about the hijra, the third sex of India and recently about Bopal and the "golden corridor". Dirk Gebhardt is working on social issues in Europe, Brazil, the Caribic and other places. Mostly on under represented issues like: "illegal immigrants", discrimination and underprivileged lives.

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To see work from Dirk Gebhardt and David Klammer go to [www.democraticbooks.org](http://www.democraticbooks.org)

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2. Arulanandam Elango SJ, Catholic Mission in Darsi, AIDS-orphans
3. CHES, Dr. P. Manorama, AIDS-orphans hospital
4. Samuha-Samraksha, Smt. Sangamitra Iyengar, HIV-hospital and trucker education
5. The Humsafar Trust, Mr. Putul Singh, Minority-Project