

Faith For Harm Reduction

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The launch of the #Faith4HarmReduction Manual

Media Brief

Alliance India, together with United Religions Initiative, Parmath Niketan and UNOICT is launching the **Training Module for sensitising Faith-Based Communities on Health and Rights-Based Approach to Drug Use.**

Key facts about people who use drugs

In India currently, 6.3% of people who inject drugs are believed to be living with HIV, of whom only 50% are aware of their status. Even though HIV prevention efforts in the northeast region of the country have been effective in reducing the number of new infections amongst people who use drugs, there is growing evidence that the number of people who use (and inject) drugs are increasing and are at very high risk of HIV, HCV, opioid overdose and other comorbid conditions. Further, evidence of higher HIV prevalence among sub-populations of people who inject drugs is also emerging. For instance, a 2015 study by UNODC in Northeast India found the HIV rate to be three times higher in women than men, among people who inject drugs. The reasons for this are numerous, one of them being high levels of sexual violence experienced by women who use drugs.

The situation is synonymous at a global level too. A UNAIDS report in 2016, 'Do no harm: health, human rights and people who use drugs', showed how the global responses to protect the health and human rights of people who use drugs was failing. The report provided a road map for countries to reduce the harms that are associated with drug use, and to turn around their drug-related HIV epidemics. Three years later, in 2019 the report 'Health, rights and drugs: harm reduction, decriminalisation and zero discrimination for people who use drugs', showed that people who use drugs continue to be left behind. It also highlighted how despite the decline in new HIV infections among adults worldwide by 14% between 2011 and 2017, there had been no decrease in the annual number of new HIV infections among people who inject drugs.

Strengthening Harm Reduction

In 2018, in collaboration with the United Religions Initiative (URI), India HIV/AIDS Alliance (i.e., Alliance India) launched a unique initiative to build bridges between harm reduction and faith-based communities called 'Faith For Harm Reduction'. #Faith4HarmReduction is one of its kind programme in India dedicated to building capacity and mobilising community at the intersection of harm reduction and faith-based assemblies. Born from conversations with communities of faith, harm reduction organisations, and network of people who use drugs, #Faith4HarmReduction fulfils a unique role as convener, community mobiliser, and capacity builder, fostering innovative-and previously untapped-cross-sector collaborations to expand and strengthen harm reduction in principle, practice, and policy.

At Alliance India, the affected and afflicted communities are at the core of what we do and why we exist. People who use drugs and their fundamental rights are largely being outdistanced. Too often, these rights are being denied, which adds to the barriers in their access to essential health and harm reduction services. We have learnt that criminalisation of people who use drugs helps to fuel stigma, discrimination, abuse and other violations of rights in many settings, including the healthcare system. For many people who use drugs, this creates a significant barrier to accessing services while perpetuating mental health issues that may, in turn, lead to situations and behaviours that increase drug users' vulnerability to HIV.

Harm Reduction Advocacy in Asia Programme of the Global Fund

With an aim to removing stigma, creating harm reduction champions, facilitating better access to healthcare services, and fostering partnerships for humanising the people who use drugs, the #Faith4HarmReduction initiative was conceived under the "Harm Reduction Advocacy in Asia" (HRAAsia) programme, funded by the Global Fund. The HRAAsia Programme is being executed in 7 Asian countries under a unique partnership involving national

governments, civil society organisations, community networks and strategic stakeholders, i.e., UN, faith-based organisations and academia, amongst others.

About the Faith For Harm Reduction Manual

The #Faith4HarmReduction manual is a culmination of the aforementioned efforts and synergies that aims to create a cadre of faith champions across India's faith-based communities, individuals and practitioners. The manual is the first step that intertwines the concepts of righteousness, insaniyat (humanity) and sewa (service) found widely across all religions to theologically highlight the narrative of harm reduction in various faith traditions. Within the framework of righteousness, most faith traditions tend to prevent or undermine the use of drugs. This is not because of its association to committing a sinful act and internalising the moral and cultural context; but for reasons of health, wellbeing and peace. The quality of righteousness is, therefore, taken by the individual in a way that their necessary and indispensable acts fulfil their responsibility towards self and society. The manual will be pilot tested in India initially. Subsequently, it will be adapted and circulated in the Asia region using the e-learning platform of the United Nations Office of Information Communication and Technology (UNOICT).

Invitation to the media fraternity

We request journalists and reporters from print and online media houses to kindly join us along with the eminent interfaith leaders, the Global Fund, the United Nations, other development partners and community leaders on the eve of the UN Day on 23 October 2020. We value your role in bringing the spotlight on the initiative to improve the ecosystem of health and rights for people who use drugs. Given the current COVID-19 situation, the event will be organised online with the gathering of a few offsite.

We look forward to your presence virtually; the zoom link will be shared with you post your confirmation. The zoom webinar link will also be updated on Alliance India's Facebook – event page. <https://www.facebook.com/indiahivaidssalliance/events>

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About URI

United Religions Initiative is a global grassroots interfaith network that cultivates peace and justice by engaging people to bridge religious and cultural differences and work together for the good of their communities and the world.

For more information, visit:

Website: <https://www.uri.org>

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