

## Programme on HIV and AIDS

**Rehabilitation Programme for the HIV + Women:** HIV/AIDS is still prevalent in many parts of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. The National



Highway between Ranipet, Chittoor and Bangalore is the HIV/AIDS prone area. Many women are being affected by HIV. Our Council has been working in Ranipet, Chittoor areas for the past 45 years. We have conducted HIV/AIDS Awareness programmes in many of these areas. But the women who were affected by HIV at Bangarupalayam village, Chittoor Dt., were approaching us for help. The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) through

ESHA (Ecumenical Solidarity for HIV & AIDS) was kind enough to sanction a grant of Rs. 1,00,000/- to distribute goats for the women affected by HIV under Rehabilitation Programme.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011 a programme was organized by Mr. Issac Baldwin Raju, Co-ordinator, Chittoor area. The goats were distributed to 20 HIV Positive women. Mr. B. Bade Naik, the Mandal Development Officer appreciated both NCCI and Tamilnad Christian Council for helping the HIV Victims. He assured the women that he would arrange a monthly pension of Rs.500/- to every HIV +Woman. Mr. N. Chandran, MEO from the Collector's office was also very happy about the



programme and he assured to arrange ration rice of 35 kgs. every month till their life time. Dr. D. Krishnaiah, Medical Doctor, assured to give more support.

We have distributed goats to the women affected by the HIV+ through the help of NCCI –ESHA.

(Representatives from NCCI-ESHA visited our organization and are seen in the picture) The goats were distributed to 18 HIV + Women and 2 HIV+ teen boys last year. While distribution, all the goats were 3 to 4 months pregnant.

We hereunder communicate some of the feed back of the programme:

Mrs. Hamsa, W/o. Late Sokaiah, aged 29yrs from Nagampalli village, Bangaru palayam, Chittoor. Husband died of HIV. Having one son and she could not able to educate him properly. The goat delivered two kids and she sold it and from the money she purchased school uniform, book, notebooks for her son. She also purchased one cow. She is rearing both. She was very grateful for this help given by us.

Mrs. Valliyamma, W/o. Rajendran, aged 46yrs. She has 5 children (4girls & 1boy), Basavapalli village, Gudipala (M.D). All the daughters were married. Her son was also infected by HIV. She had her son both are living together. The goat which was given to her had delivered two kids. She sold one and used it for her son's treatment for stomach paid. Now they are rearing the other goats.

**World AIDS Day :** We have organized a Rally and an awareness programme along with the CSI St.Thomas Matriculation School Children, St. Thomas Mount. Mrs. Rokkiah (a) Salma, Chairman, Tamilnadu Social Welfare Board was invited as the Chief guest.



## 2. “Maathamma” Women Programme at Nagari & Nagalapuram:



Maathamman is a rural deity, a Telugu version of the Tamil “Mariamman” This deity is the author of prosperity, health, deliverance and happiness. Maathamman is the savior of the out caste communities. The people are taught and strongly believe that any problem could be solved by dedication and submission to Maathamman. The poorest among the poor and particularly women solely depend on the help and benevolence of this goddess. If a child

falls sick with non-stop diarrhea, fever, dehydration, or malnutrition related illness etc, the people are guided by the temple priests to dedicate the child to Maathamman. The child is left in the temple at the feet of the goddess after ceremony of treatment with lemon fruit and other herbs. The child is named after the name of the goddess. If the child recovers from illness the female child

is called “Maathamma” and the male child is called “Maathaiah”. The children from that time forward become the servant of goddess Maathamma, the property of the temple and they belong to the society. The poor do not seek professional medical help for their children due to poverty. Hospitals are located far away from the village. Frequent transportation is not available. Other modes of transportation are expensive. Treatment is beyond their capacity. Their ardent faith in their goddess becomes handy and effective too.

This faith practice takes a different socio-religious and exploitative and devastating turn when the girl child attains puberty. The girl child is now assertively the property of the village. As a common property she is forced to participate in the Maathamman festivals as dancer. She is forced to get drunk and dance accordingly to the drum beat. While dancing the village men shove money into her garments. Most of the Maathamman become naked during dance performance. She has no option because it is the service she offers to the goddess that gave her life. If she turns down the offer and demand to participate in the festival as a dancer she will fall in to the rage of the goddess and the consequences will be severe.



The dancer of the festival is the goddess Maathamman herself. Therefore people give her gifts in kind and cash. She is offered a hundred kilos of rice, pulses and other items that is sufficient for the family to survive for two months. For the family that starved day in and day out, the festival brings boon of plenty and prosperity. The dancer will also have the privilege sleeping with the landlords and other affluent men in the village on the festival nights. It is the experience of “Divine Prostitution”. Whenever the landlords and others wanted to drink and dance and become lustful, Maathammans are invited. Maathammans are filled with divine spirit and dance and finally lay themselves in the hands of lustful men.

Maathammans deliver children and all of them know only their mothers. Even Maathammans may not know who impregnated them. Maathammans have a husband, who is usually the servant of the landlord, married to her for the sake of social status. So, thus the husbands do not take care of the children and Maathammans cannot rightfully demand anything from their husbands. The Maathamman’s children become Maathammans by privilege and the practice continues.

There is government legislation. The practice is banned and is punishable under Criminal Act with fine and imprisonment. But the system continues without name and form. The higher government officials simply deny the prevalence of the practice in these regions for the sake of evading administrative problems but in reality girl children are becoming religious prostitutes’ generation after generation.

The practice continues with the support of the victimized Maathamans, because the system offers them a profession which fetches them easy earning. In a situation, where there is no job and available jobs are hard and strenuous with minimum wages and a big booty in the name of pure religion and culture which knocks at the door is preferred. Maathamans are free from dowry harassments and therefore the family encourages children to turn in to Maathamman. Maathamans make big fortunes and they are resourceful to the whole family.

We organized 2 programme for some of the Maathammas on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011 and 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011 at Nagalapuram. Their conditions were very pathetic especially the older maathammas are suffering with different types of diseases. They informed us of various types of problems they are facing every day.

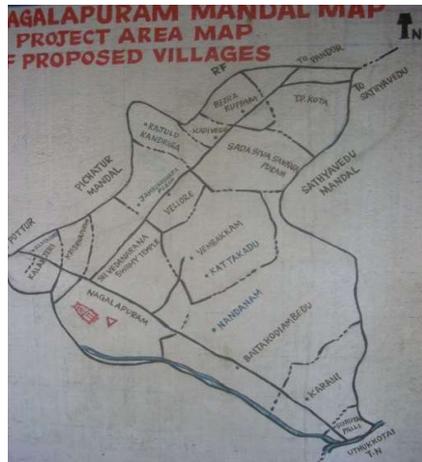


Our chief aim is to save women and girl children from the clutches of exploitation, dehumanizing beliefs and practices and inhuman treatment.

Provide an opportunity to at least 100 Child-Maathamans to complete school, high school education. They may be motivated to continue their studies until they learn skills for

employment. Child- Maathamans require hostel facility. They need to be separated from their mothers and the villagers to grow in a healthy and caring atmosphere.

Adult-Maathamans require a short stay home for reorientation, care and guidance and counseling, to save their lives from disaster. This will also help them to handle serious encounters and threatening issues.



Aged-Maathamans need care and occupation until they breathe last.

Create socio-economic and religio-political awareness among the villagers on the Maathamman issue.

We are planning to launch this programme in the following villages: Nandhanam, Kodimbedu, Ramapuram, Ramagiri, Achinadu Kandigai, Karani, Eteyam Kandigai, Pulikundram, Bethasigiri, Chinnasigiri, Nagalapuram, Vellore, Karur, Beerakuppam, SSPuram, TBKottai, Janikiapuram, Churchiragi Kandigai.