



The key objective of the SIRHASC (Strengthening the Institutional Response to HIV/AIDS/STIs in the Caribbean) Project is “to strengthen the capacity of existing regional institutions to plan and coordinate an effective response to the HIV/AIDS/STI especially in the worst affected countries.”

That is to say, the project is not geared towards reinventing the wheel, but rather at creating synergy among the different structures, while using and improving on existing skills and capabilities.

The goal of the project is to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean and its expected outputs are:

1. An increased pool of appropriately skilled personnel able to contribute to effective policy development, planning and implementation of HIV/AIDS/STI programmes;
2. Increased regional awareness of the benefits, costs and operational feasibility of interventions to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV;
3. An expanded an effective regional network of people living with HIV/AIDS in six countries, advocating for improved care and support and contributing to national policy development;
4. Improved regional capacity to design, implement and evaluate interventions to reduce high risk behaviour related to the spread of HIV infection;
5. More comprehensive and accurate information on the course, consequences and cost of the epidemic through improved surveillance, monitoring, and evaluation of national control programmes through operational research.

The major players in the Project are the European Union (EU) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), whereas the implementing agencies are the Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CRN+), the Caribbean Health Research Council (CHRC), the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), the University of the West Indies (UWI), and the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS).

CRN+’s outputs in the context of this project are:

1. To develop an expanded and effective regional network of PLWHA in six countries advocating for improved care and support, and contributing to national policy development
2. To develop a regional network of PLWHA in the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Grenada, and St. Lucia.

These outputs address the need for input from the PLWHA community and their responsibility as advocates, starting at the national level with the National AIDS Programmes (NAPs) and National AIDS Coordinators (NACs).

## **Report of Activities for 2004**

The activities scheduled for 2004 were as follows:

- Institutional and financial support to the six National Networks and CRN+ Secretariat in Trinidad and Tobago:
  - Operational costs for National Networks: office rent, utilities, stationery, etc.
  - Stipends for unemployed volunteers in the National Networks
  - Operational costs for CRN+ Secretariat
  - Support for three salary positions at the Secretariat: Regional Coordinator, Programme Officer, Administrative Assistant
- Six capacity-building workshops in Antigua, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, and St. Lucia
- Two PLWHA exchange visits.

Among those activities, the following were implemented:

- Operational costs support to the National Networks and CRN+ Secretariat
- Salary support to CRN+
- Stipends for volunteers
- Capacity-building workshops in Guyana (March 2004), Antigua (May 2004), St Lucia (September 2004) and Jamaica (November 2004)
- Mission visits to Jamaica (May 2004) and Grenada (October 2004)
- Two exchange visits to Trinidad (June 2004) with two representatives each from the Guyana Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (G+), Guyana and Health Hope and HIV Foundation (HHH), Antigua
- Technical assistance to CRN+ from the consultancy firm, Human Resources Development Limited (HRDL). This resulted in the preparation of a final report on the Structural and Operational Audit of local PLWHA networks organizations, which was circulated to the six networks; consultancy on the establishment of an appropriate governance structure for CRN+; and the revision of its Constitution.

Incomplete activities included:

- Capacity-building workshop in Haiti. This training session was originally scheduled for May 2004, and had to be postponed due to the existing political climate of the country.
- Remarks on National Networks

These comments are based on the monthly reports of activities sent by the networks, general correspondence and HRDL report on the Structural and Operational Audit of local PLWHA networks organizations.

Over the period, progress was noted in the following areas:

1. Strategic and/or Operational Planning/ Network Re-organisation

### **Guyana**

The Executive had not been performing well over a period of a few months. In March 2004, G+ members expressed their dissatisfaction and set up two interim committees: a Standing Committee and an Expansion Committee, to manage operations until the G+ Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June.

The AGM took place as scheduled and a new Executive Board was elected. Subsequently, there was a two-day Board orientation and strategic planning meeting. Board members had an opportunity to learn about their roles and responsibilities and to discuss the future of G+.

SIRHASC volunteers also drafted a plan of activities for the no-cost extension period of the project.

### **Haiti**

Not only did GIPA Haiti overcome its financial and accountability issues but it also submitted an operational plan for the period April 2004 - March 2005 to various organizations.

Their activities included care, support, sensitization and self-support training and fund-raising. Generally, they produced quality work and initiated original activities.

### **Jamaica**

The President of the Jamaican Network of Seropositives (JN+) resigned in December 2003. The Board ceased to function and the Secretariat, which lost its office, was non-operational. Moreover, the team of volunteers under the SIRHASC project ceased working *de facto*. An Interim Steering Committee (ISC) was set up in January 2004 to assist the Network with overcoming the constitutional crisis.

This Steering Committee included JN+ members and representatives from the Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Committee (NAC), United Nations Theme Group (UNTG), and UNICEF.

The ISC met regularly between January and April 2004, the focus of discussions being JN+ issues and the way forward for the network. A consultant was hired to assist in the revitalization of JN+. Two major objectives for JN+ were to reinstate a Board of Directors and to hold an Annual General Meeting by the close of 2004.

### **St. Lucia**

In June 2004, the Tender Loving Care Support Group (TLC) worked with a consultant to draft a workplan for 2004-2005. Their Annual General Meeting took place one month later and a new Executive Board was elected.

#### **2. Infrastructure & Human Resources**

St. Lucia, Guyana and Grenada all saw an increase in membership over the past year.

National Networks in Antigua, Guyana and Haiti all conducted advocacy workshops for their membership, while the St. Lucia network, TLC, held workshops on Nutrition. GIPA Haiti also conducted workshops on counselling, sensitization, women and AIDS, access to care and treatment, while HHH in Antigua held a workshop on home-based Care. With respect to infrastructural development, HHH and TLC bought equipment at the beginning of the year and TLC set up their phone and internet line in January. JN+ relocated to new offices in April 2004, while G+ relocated in June.

On another note, there has been an overall improvement with respect to teamwork within the National Networks and in the format and frequency of reporting to the Secretariat.

### 3. Other Activities

Establishment of new partnerships

<b>National Network</b>	<b>Partner Organizations</b>
HHH (Antigua)	Ministry of Health Local health centers Various faith-based organizations
Hope Pals (Grenada)	Clinton Foundation National AIDS Council National Infectious Disease Control Peace Corps Red Cross
G+ (Guyana)	National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) Stabroek News USAID/FHI Ministry of Health
GIPA Haiti (Haiti)	Gheskio Center (Access to medication/ Referral system) GFATM NGO Parole et Action Sogebank Foundation United Nations (UNV Project) UNAIDS World Food Programme Other support groups with respect to the national proposal to the GFATM

<b>National Network</b>	<b>Partner Organizations</b>
TLC (St Lucia)	Clinton Foundation National AIDS Programme Ministry of Health Red Cross

### **Outreach activities**

**Antigua**

Activities included speaking engagements on the radio and in schools.

**Guyana**

G+ has been very active. There have been visits to hospitals, providing sheets and towels to the patients; distribution of condoms; concerts and interventions in schools and churches.

**Haiti**

GIPA Haiti has participated in interviews on stigma and discrimination and sensitization programs in the south of the country (training of youth) and sensitization programmes with church leaders.

**St. Lucia**

TLC's activities have included speaking engagements on the radio and conducting HIV/AIDS education programmes in primary schools.

**Next Steps**

Following the recommendations of the mid-term review team, the European Union has extended the SIRHASC project at no cost from July 2004 until December 2005. In its workplan for this period, CRN+ has included a new output, namely, the building of a private/public partnership between the National Networks and health care facilities in counseling and follow-up services, through the organisation of five three-day workshops for PLWHA networks and health care providers.

To ensure the National Networks' sustainability after the conclusion of the project, the capacity-building workshops will consist of orientation sessions where the Networks' members will learn how to operationalize their respective workplans.