or principles, help in policy development and provide support services for expansion to facilitate the most important part of their job which is counselling, treatment adherence by home advocacy," says Dr M Ziya Uddin, HIV/AIDS Specialist, UNICEF Bangladesh.

"The distraught women do not know about HIV/AIDS and care treatment. They do not receive treatment due to the fear of stigma and discrimination, lack of knowledge and family and social support. They do not speak about their health problems with family members for the fear of being deprived of their husbands' properties. To raise their concerns and provide them with a platform AP started some initial level activities like counselling, training on ARV drug adherence, human rights, gender, networking visits, referral linkages etc.

"To strengthen AP's role as a new organisation, it is necessary to ensure good governance for which they need to develop human resoures and develop a financial policy to maintain transparency, develop personal policies and M&E manuals under this programme. AP will also have to organise different training programme and workshops for capacity building to develop their organisation so that they can establish themselves as an independent organisation and raise funds to work for the PLHIV women in Bangladesh," feels Dr Ziya.



Neela Akter is a strong, confident woman. She is HIV positive but that leaves no trace of despair in her. Her strength comes from the fact that she has seen life at its cruellest and she has successfully turned the wheels of her fate and once again she begun to dream of a better future.

"My husband was an immigrant worker in Kuwait, I had one son and a shop of my own, I lived with my in-laws and things were going fine until January 2009 when my husband abruptly returned home sick. He did not tell me why he came back but I could see that he frequently became sick with fever, jaundice, diarrhoea. He said he had diabetes for which he was ill. We took him to the hospital but nothing was found wrong with him then finally we went to Suhrawardy where the doctors confirmed he had AIDS. I was nine months pregnant at that time with my daughter and my husband passed away shortly after being diagnosed. My brothers-in-law immediately asked me to get checked and when I tested positive they threw me out of my own house, took away my son, my shop and all my savings. It all happened almost simultaneously. I gave birth to my daughter and half an hour after her birth she was given medicines to protect her from being infected. The medicines continued until she was 18 months old and tested negative. My mother took me in and gave us shelter. I came to AP and found a job here. I got my son back. He is 18 years old now and I got him admitted to the Open University to finish his school finals. I have not looked back ever since," Akter relates her story.

Dedicated as she is Akter's counselling has helped many distraught women like her. It is easy for her to understand their troubles because she has been in their shoes. The stories of Khairun Nahar of Jessore or Nahar Akter of Brahmanbaria or Mahmuda Akter of Mirzapore are all similar. Some got infected by their immigrant worker husbands and some got infected while receiving blood transfusions during delivery. Their stigma and discrimination, the sordid tales of their lives are all too common for PLHIV. Yet when they all sit together talking about their woes and problems they gather hope from each other to carry on with life. AsharProdeep gives these women the strength and confidence to know that being HIV positive is not the end; proper health care, regular medication and peer support can help them live relatively normal and respectable lives.

The writer is Editor, Star Lifestyle.