



HIV&AIDS, Communication and Stigma

Reducing stigma and discrimination among vulnerable groups using communication strategies and tools.

"We have seen the slave trade go, we have seen apartheid go. We have seen many diseases conquered. HIV need not be an exception. We can defeat it if we get our act together"

(Canon Gideon Byamugisha, co-founder of the African network of religious leaders living with or affected by HIV (ANERELA+).

"Stigma shouldn't be seen as residing in the individual with a disease, but it resides in the society that has not found a way to be inclusive. We have a duty to diagnose and treat this stigma."

Dr. John Manton, Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine at Oxford.

Relevance

Stigma and discrimination related to HIV&AIDS are frequently spread through lack of knowledge, by traditional and cultural practices, and religious beliefs. Religious and community leaders tend to equate HIV&AIDS with sin and moral impropriety. The persistence of prejudice against PLWHA among religious leaders, community leaders, media practitioners and other local key influencers in Africa and other parts of the world is fuelling the HIV&AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. Local key influencers lack knowledge about the severe negative impact of stigma and discrimination on efforts to combat the epidemic.

Ambition

- Increased understanding of HIV&AIDS and enhanced communication and advocacy skills of religious leaders, community and opinion leaders, women groups' leaders and youth groups' leaders, teachers, health workers and media practitioners, so that they can fight HIV&AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.
- Development and implementation of a variety of communication strategies and tools to fight stigma: from theatre, music, dance, sport, competitions, community radio and TV to sermons, reflections, storytelling and testimonies.

Priorities

- To increase knowledge and understanding of HIV&AIDS issues of religious leaders (transmission, prevention, care and treatment) through communication training, campaigning and mobilisation, aiming at becoming more inclusive and AIDS-competent religious communities.
- To establish strategic alliances with religious leaders and other local key influencers to lead campaigns and actions aimed at reducing HIV&AIDS-related stigma and discrimination by applying rights-based participatory communication strategies.

Geographic Scope

WACC has supported and is supporting HIV/AIDS-related Projects in Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East. Here below some highlights:

Africa

Benin: Espoir de la Famille (EPFONG): Breaking the Silence around HIV&AIDS by training church leaders, women leaders and youth activists to find a Christian response to the pandemic. The project aims at increasing their knowledge and raising their capacity to deal with HIV & AIDS, especially stigmatisation, discrimination and rejection of PLWHAs.

Kenya: The Catholic Diocese of Nakuru (CDN) – Peer Education on Stigma and Discrimination and Behaviour Change in Secondary Schools & Colleges by offering accurate information and using youth friendly media like plays, skits, dramas, festivals and songs (www.cathdnkenya.org)

South Africa: Southern African Media and Gender Institute (SAMGI): Media Monitoring HIV&AIDS through a Gender Lens (www.samgi.org.za) in order to stimulate dialogue, promote advocacy and contribute to the reduction of stigma and discrimination against PLWHAs, especially women.

Tanzania: Tanzania Development and AIDS Prevention (TADEPA): Strengthening the Capacity of 'FBOs' Leaders to reduce HIV&AIDS-related Stigma, to offer appropriate Counselling to HIV+ people and to become HIV/AIDS Educators to their congregations (www.tadepa.net)

Uganda: Entebbe Women's Association (EWA): Tools to Fight Stigma among HIV+ Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Northern Uganda where the combined impact of HIV & AIDS and conflict on families and communities has been devastating.

Asia

India: The Diocese of Madurai and Ramnad (DMR): Innovative, Cost effective and Efficient Communication Strategies and Tools developed and activities implemented to address the issues of stigma and discriminations among church leaders and members.

Caribbean

Jamaica: Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC): Faith Based Organisations, Behaviour Change and Combating the Spread of HIV&AIDS (www.mona.uwi.edu/carimac).

Latin America

Colombia: In 2007, Comunicación Positiva trained 30 leaders among people living with HIV and AIDS from 12 cities to use new digital media, community communication and other forms of communication to increase awareness of the infringement of rights of people living with HIV and AIDS and to defend them (www.comunicacionpositiva.org)

Chile: Corporación Red Evangélica de Desarrollo y Servicios (REDES): Protestant Women Communicators trained representatives of women groups how to produce radio programmes on topics rarely tackled or completely ignored like sexuality, HIV &

AIDS myths and prejudices, and gender in order to increase HIV and AIDS prevention.

Middle East

Egypt: The Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS): Due to the increasing threat of HIV and AIDS, sexual abuses and cultural constraints in Egypt and the Arab World, there is need to break the silence around the pandemic and address all other issues and circumstances that are conducive to its spread. The silence needs to be replaced with HIV/AIDS education and knowledge shedding lights on sexual and reproductive health information for women in Egypt and the Arab world (www.ceoss.org.eg; www.darelthaqafa.com).

Specific Initiatives

- *In Ghana and Rwanda*, following a recommendation of the Board, a series of projects were implemented by WACC-identified partners, Christian Council of Ghana and Le Centre de Formation et de Documentation respectively. CCG & CFD work with specific groups of beneficiaries who are considered to be influencers in their communities so that they can take the lead in challenging HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. Those beneficiaries include church leaders, leaders of the Islamic community, women groups' leaders, youth leaders, teachers, health workers, media practitioners, PLWHAs (People Living with and Affected by HIV&AIDS) and other local key leaders.
- In 2007, WACC and Council for World Mission (CMW) produced a tool kit accompanied by a facilitator manual for youth educators on how to address HIV & AIDS. WACC's special contribution is to show how communication strategies and tools can effectively contribute to the prevention of the spread of HIV virus. WACC is working on a distribution strategy in order to have the tool kit widely used not only by CWM's members but by all churches, grassroots groups and NGOs worldwide. One way is to have the tool kit translated in Chinese, French, Swahili and other languages.

Key organisations: EAA (WACC is represented on the Strategy Group since EAA's inception); WCC through EHAIA West Africa (WACC's partner –Christian Council of Ghana – works closely with EHAIA in all their activities; and CWM (WACC produced a tool kit and facilitator's manual for peer educators).

<p>Goal To combat the spread of HIV/AIDS and the suffering it causes by contributing to the reduction of stigma and discrimination against people living with and affected by the epidemic.</p>
<p>Purpose To reduce stigma and discrimination by building the capacity of religious leaders, other local key influencers (traditional and opinion leaders, women and youth groups' leaders, teachers, health workers and media practitioners) and PLWHA groups to develop and implement a rights-based communications advocacy strategy.</p>
<p>Outputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and advocacy training materials targeting religious leaders, other local key leaders and leaders of PLWHA groups, on HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination are developed • Coordinated anti-stigma networks of religious leaders, community and opinion leaders, women leaders, youth leaders, teachers, media practitioners, health workers and PLWHA groups will be formed • Specific advocacy campaigns carried out in different constituencies of primary beneficiaries. • Lessons learnt knowledge, best practices and communication tools disseminated locally, nationally, regionally and internationally.