

## Gender, HIV and AIDS and the role of the church in Africa

Joint initiative between Tearfund, Vigilance and Christian AIDS Taskforce

UK, Burkina Faso & Zimbabwe

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## What prompted the original research?

In 2004 UNAIDS stated most vulnerable person to HIV and AIDS is the married woman  
Tearfund wanted to know

- Is it the same in church communities?
- If so, why?
- What can be done about the situation?
- Is anyone (partners/INGO's/academia) tackling the issue and if so, what are their successes and frustrations?

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## Why are we doing this?

- Organisations are well placed to do the project - evangelical organisation – operating within our niche area
- The church is recognised as a powerful and strong influence on gender relations within Africa
- If the spread of HIV & AIDS is to be slowed or reversed then the engagement of the church in Africa is crucial

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## Research

This was in two phases;

### Scoping research

- Information that already exists
- Organisations working on the issue
- Successes/failures

### Field Visits

- South Africa – Various NGO's, KZN University, and Churches
- Bulawayo, Zimbabwe – Christian AIDS Taskforce (CAT)
- Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Vigilance

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## Quotes from the original research

'The men treat us like beasts and animals. They come in, have sex, and leave.' Wife of a Christian, Burkina Faso

'I expect my wife to bow down before me as I bow down before Christ.' Pastor, Zimbabwe

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## So what did we do?

- Results published Gender & Devt journal
- Supported 2 projects – Zimbabwe and Burkina Faso
- Innovative, new ideas, tackle Biblical perspective
- Disseminated information to a wide audience as possible over the last 2 years

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## So what are we doing to change this situation?

### Overall Goal:

To challenge attitudes and change behaviour on gender relations & sexual rights within a selection of evangelical local churches in Burkina Faso and Zimbabwe in order to reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS

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## How did we do this?

- Marriage seminars
- Gender workshops with young people
- Gender and HIV workshops with different target groups in the church
- Looked at opportunities to reach men where they could be found e.g. football matches
- Worked with Pastors in the local church
- Gender training
- Regular prayer and prayer email

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## Results in Burkina Faso

### Most Significant Change: Vivalago Women

- Pray together
- Love increased in the home
- Sex life is better – practice and communication
- Communication within the home
- **MSC: The exchange of dialogue together in the home and the joint decision making for the family including praying together.**

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## What the Vivalago women said

*'It has given us empowerment.'*

*'It has very much helped in my household. We have had challenges and changes and it is a relief for us.'*

*'We were taught that men and women are equal in the Bible. We previously thought that we were not equal.'*

*'We know now a lady can be a deacon, and preach and tithe.'*

*'Our sex life, practice and how we do it and the dialogue is better.'*

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## Young women - Ouagadougou

- Relationship with parents improved – esp fathers
- Relationships between our parents over our dress and what we wear. Before we were wearing short skirts and being told off and we used to wear a long skirt over the top and take it off away from home to reveal the short skirt underneath. Now don't wear short skirts – its for ourselves not for anybody.
- Now we start doing things in the home before we are asked.
- Communication between us and everybody has improved.
- It will help with our future husbands to communicate our likes and dislikes and negotiate over sex
- **MSC: Change of mentality – in the past we thought some activities were only appropriate for men but now we know anyone can do it**

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## Rural Men - Vivalago

### Most Significant Change: Vivalago Men

- Family life - Before, men weren't interested in family life. Now the family is much more unified. Men are interested in their children which they weren't before. Family goods are now shared and managed together
- Men now communicate what they are doing
- Women are now much more involved in church life. Free to do similar things that men do
- **MSC: Men sleep with wife, in the same house, in the same bed.**

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## Young Men, Ouagadougou

- 1 – School
  - Respect for teachers has increased
  - Respect for girls has increased – they allow them to talk!
- 2 – Family
  - Both parents are respected
  - They help with domestic work
- 3 – Church
  - They're more involved in church activities
  - They respect leader

**MSC: Now consider girls more than they used to, with big impact on their lives and the lives of those around them. Although they are doing things that other boys their age don't do, they still do it because they can see the value.**

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## Vigilance – the partner

- Staff conducted the baseline survey & discovered gender was the main issue for themselves
- Gender is an international issue for the church
- All staff (inc drivers) went through gender training
- Staff realised that change started with them in their own homes

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## Results from Zimbabwe

- Project wedding – 2 couples got married
- Women openly express love to spouse and look forward to having sex
- No longer promiscuous and no longer take other people's husbands
- Men – 'We are more in love now and better than friends'
- Men- 'We have learnt to submit to one another'
- Some girls have learnt to say 'NO' to boys and men and sex as well as to withstand peer pressure.
- 'I can now speak freely with my children about sexuality'

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## Results from Zimbabwe cont.

- 'I no longer beat up my wife'.
- 'Yes I have changed in communication, and sometimes people would abuse me and I did not know it as abuse but now I know how to handle it.'
- 'I treat my husband with love now. We had stopped doing some intimate things we used to do earlier on. Now we do them and I show my husband love now.'
- 'Our family relationships have changed, now we openly discuss issues with our parents.'

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## Bulawayo – Urban Church

- Women: 'Sex is a great medicine in our relationship. Can initiate it now without feeling ashamed. The results are fantastic. Its like we are young again.'
- Men: 'It has helped me deal with pride'
- Men: 'Relationship with the family has changed. There is now forgiveness, love and respect for them.'
- Young women: 'Used to think that it was alright in a love relationship for a man to beat the wife. Now know to report such incidents'
- Young men: 'My eyes have been opened to the issues of abuse & I realise I am guilty of abusing my friends and girlfriends'

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## Tearfund - results

- Perseverance produces results
- Clarity of communication key – use phone more than email
- Prayer meeting and email – God has worked
- Even in what seems the most hopeless of situations God brings light and change much quicker than expected at times
- Internal profile on gender has been raised through this project
- Now have a draft Theological framework on gender

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## What next?

- Looking for further funding for expansion
- Produce & distribute a case study
- Communicate widely that engaging the church in gender produces results
- Incorporate gender into all work
- Remember 'Gender is an international issue for the church'

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## Questions

- What issues are there in your region on Gender, HIV and the Church?
- What are the barriers to progress?
- What good practice or ideas do you have to share?
- What action will you now take within the next month?

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## The challenge ahead

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