Mobilizing Religious Leaders and Communities to Address GBV and HIV

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Background

- USAID | Health Policy Initiative-funded project

- Partnership with Religions for Peace
  - Women of Faith Network identified GBV as a priority area
    - Religious leaders, communities, and faith-based organizations spur positive social change

- Project objectives
  - Strengthen the capacity of religious leaders, communities, and networks to respond to GBV as it relates to HIV
  - Equip religious communities with tools to deepen their awareness and understanding of GBV
  - Enhance faith-based activities regarding GBV
Pilot Intervention in Africa, 2007-2008

- **Regional training** on GBV and HIV for women of faith and male religious leaders. Participants from Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

- **Small grants and national action plans** for training participants to work with communities on GBV and HIV.

Small group work, Nairobi regional training, August 2007. Courtesy of Health Policy Initiative.
Pilot Intervention in Africa, 2007-2008

• **Regional leadership forum** on GBV and HIV for senior religious leaders from 16 countries, including reports from participants from the regional training.

• **GBV and HIV resource materials** for religious leaders and communities:
  – Training manual
  – Toolkit
  – Advocacy guide

Intervention Achievements

• Increased engagement and commitment from religious leaders to addressing GBV and HIV issues

• Higher level of multi-faith collaboration related to GBV and HIV activities

• Establishment and expansion of multi-faith women’s networks in five countries

• Strengthening of networks through increased resources from external donors
Further Impact

• Religious leaders and networks continue to educate through
  – Workshops, skills building (marriage reconciliation, counseling, female genital cutting)
  – Sermons, homilies
  – Media, Diocesan radio

• Other initiatives include
  – Mainstreaming GBV into other activities
  – Creating task teams to establish GBV/HIV programs, such as support groups
  – Developing and implementing health policies in religious institutions
  – Supporting girls’ education; sponsoring girls in school
  – Focusing on human rights within religious institutions
  – Engaging in national government efforts
Lessons Learned: How to Work with Religious Leaders?

• Religious groups already working on HIV or other social issues may be more receptive

• Working with established religious organizations or networks facilitates greater buy-in
  – Politics is a factor

• Need education and support, including time to reflect on issues from faith perspectives, and quality control

• Trainings organized for separate faiths can provide more in-depth discussion

• GBV focus needs to be flexible
  – Religious leaders may only be willing to work on certain issues
Lessons Learned: What Can Religious Leaders Do?

- Religious leaders can take action on GBV and HIV by
  - Educating people within religious institutions and communities, and across faiths
  - Offering spiritual support to those affected by GBV and HIV
  - Providing GBV and HIV prevention and support programs
  - Committing publicly to addressing GBV and HIV
  - Institutionalizing support for addressing GBV and HIV

“As the guardians of the religious texts, religious leaders are best placed to guide and influence their communities…It is recommended that religious leaders be exposed to education and awareness in respect of GBV and the link between HIV and AIDS in communities.”

—Recommendations from the participants of the Regional Training on GBV and HIV for Religious Leaders, Nairobi, August 2007.
Lessons Learned: How to Support Women of Faith?

• Women of faith can initiate and lead GBV/HIV programs
  – Women’s networks need their own support and resources
  – External support results in buy-in from religious institutions
  – Women’s desks or networks can lead GBV efforts within larger religious institutions
  – Partnerships with male religious leaders are crucial

Options for Expanding GBV Programming

• Support religious leaders and organizations in providing GBV and HIV services, including referrals.

• Provide technical assistance for high-quality GBV education and programming, including monitoring and evaluation.

• Expand linked programming for GBV beyond HIV
  – Poverty
  – War and conflict
Takeaway Message

Working with religious leaders and organizations on GBV is an effective way of reaching communities to change social norms.

For More Information...

Project resources are available online:

- [www.healthpolicyinitiative.com](http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com)
  - Mobilizing Religious Communities to Respond to Gender-based Violence and HIV: A Training Manual

- A Call to Act: Engaging Religious Leaders and Communities in Addressing Gender-based Violence and HIV

- The Role of Religious Communities in Addressing Gender-based Violence and HIV

- Restoring Dignity: A Toolkit for Religious Communities to End Violence Against Women