



Gender, HIV and the church

A CASE STUDY

March 2009

Introduction

To prevent the spread of HIV, it is essential to address the root causes that make people vulnerable, such as the underlying gender inequalities in society. This means challenging and transforming damaging aspects of cultural expectations, gender roles and traditional practices which can increase people's vulnerability to infection. It also means building on positive cultural values and practices which reduce people's vulnerability. Churches are in a unique position to work with communities to address culturally sensitive issues such as gender and HIV, looking afresh at God's intentions for relationships between men and women.

was a Western feminist concept. By looking afresh at what the Bible says about men and women and by focusing on developing good relationships, people had a positive motivation to question and change aspects of their own culture and attitudes.

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

Young woman, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Gender and HIV

Women often do not have a choice over engaging in sexual relationships, or power to protect themselves from HIV. This is linked to gender-based violence, women's economic dependence on men, lack of access to education and society's expectations of the roles and responsibilities for men and women. Concepts of masculinity can also contribute to the spread of HIV, for example where society expects men to prove their manhood by being experienced in sexual matters before they are married, having multiple or concurrent sexual partners, being 'the man' in the home and having control over his wife.

In some places, marriage has been identified as a risk factor for women, because their husbands may already be infected, or become infected as a result of extra-marital sex, and condoms are



Engaging churches and communities to reflect on gender issues can help prevent the spread of HIV.

This case study describes a two-year pilot project to engage local churches in reflecting on gender issues. Tearfund worked with two local faith-based partner organisations – Christian AIDS Taskforce (CAT) in Zimbabwe and Vigilance in Burkina Faso. The programme

took a 'whole-life' approach, discussing gender inequality and HIV within the wider context of relationships, life skills and Christian life. Providing a biblical understanding of these issues was vital to engage churches and address the common preconception that 'gender'

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

*Woman, Vipalgo village,
Burkina Faso*

rarely used within marriage for safer sex. Adolescent girls and boys are often vulnerable to sexual exploitation by older men and women. The gender imbalance is reflected in traditional practices in some communities which put women and girls at increased risk of HIV infection. These include 'widow inheritance', female genital cutting, and offering women to male guests as a sign of hospitality. These practices are rarely challenged in communities because sex is a taboo issue, and men, women and children are brought up to accept the dominant position of males in relationships, and these traditions as unchangeable.

Church response

These damaging gender stereotypes and traditional practices, and the underlying imbalance of power between men and women which fuels them, do not reflect a sound biblical view of relationships and are contributing to the spread of HIV.

Yet research carried out by Tearfund in Zimbabwe and Burkina Faso showed that many attitudes and behaviours prevalent among Christians were based on the underlying traditional cultural values rather than on biblical principles. In many cases the church was not challenging these harmful traditional views about gender, and in fact often reinforced them through selective use of Bible passages.

For example, it was common teaching that women should submit to men, but there was no emphasis on the love that men should show their wives, or

reference to the biblical understanding that submission in marriage is mutual – husbands and wives are both required to submit to each other. This incomplete teaching can contribute to abusive relationships, where women have no say in decisions in the home or choice about sexual intercourse with their husbands.

'The men treat us like beasts and animals. They come in, have sex, and leave.'

Wife of a Christian, Burkina Faso

The church has a position of respect and influence within local communities, and religious beliefs can shape attitudes and behaviour. Working with faith leaders and through the local church is therefore vital and can provide a key to transforming cultural expectations of men and women in society.

Programme

Both CAT and Vigilance were already working with local churches, providing HIV education and awareness. They now expanded this work to include more of a focus on gender issues. They were free to design the programme that they thought would make the greatest impact and difference in their cultural contexts.

Over the two-year pilot project, CAT and Vigilance used a variety of interventions including running workshops for couples to develop relationship skills and parenting skills. They ran camps for young people focusing on general life skills, making positive choices and goal setting. They also provided teaching in churches and training for church leaders.

'I knew about HIV from lots of NGOs but this was the church talking about HIV. I wanted to know what they had to say on the issue.'

Young man, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Both organisations began by holding initial training sessions to discuss the issues with local church leaders. They were key to ensuring access to the church and the engagement of the community,



Gender inequalities can put women and girls at increased risk of HIV infection.



Group discussion during one of the workshops in Burkina Faso.

and in encouraging their congregations in the longer term to put into practice what they had learned. Attendance at workshops was higher when the church leaders invited people, reflecting the position of respect they hold in communities.

Focus on relationships

Vigilance and CAT both decided to run relationship workshops for couples within the church as a key component of the programme. These workshops focused on developing relationship skills and reflecting on biblical passages on marriage, gender and women. They aimed to help couples develop good, open and honest communication in their relationship, resolving conflict

through discussion and debate rather than violence (verbal or physical). They also discussed good parenting skills and a healthy sexual relationship – talking not just about safer sex, but about more enjoyable sex as an expression of love and a way of cementing commitment in marriage. Through building healthy and happy relationships based on mutual respect, it was hoped that there would be a subsequent reduction in multiple and concurrent partners, and so a reduction in the spread of HIV.

'The church always said 'no, no, don't sleep around, don't have sex', but with CAT it was different. They taught us the reasons, the consequences, about feelings and how to manage

our sexuality and ways to abstain. It was practical.'

Young man, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Challenging culture

During the couples' workshops, participants were encouraged to discuss gender roles and consider how social expectations of men and women are formed and maintained, and how these can increase people's vulnerability to HIV (see outline of workshop session, page 8). This led to an understanding that gender roles are not fixed, but dependent on culture, and the recognition of the negative consequences of some stereotypes. This in turn enabled participants to begin the process of analysing and transforming their own culture and community from within, inspired by a deeper understanding of biblical perspectives.

Since gender stereotypes and traditional practices vary in different cultures, any programme tackling these issues has to be adapted to address the specific local context. In this pilot, it was locally-based staff who conducted the various training sessions, so they were able to challenge the cultural context from within, using locally known stories and culturally appropriate examples. This proved very effective, whereas an outside

Case study

Pauline and Amos live in a village near Natisa, Zimbabwe. They participated in the 'Church Family Relationships' programme run by CAT at their local church. The programme covered the basic facts about HIV, developing good communication in marriage, conflict resolution and looking at what the Bible says about men and women. Both Amos and Pauline agree the programme has transformed many aspects of their relationship.

Pauline says, *'Before, we used to argue a lot and go off in different directions. Now that has changed, we listen to each other and speak softly to each other. We learnt about submission to one another. Amos submits to me and I submit to him.'* Amos agrees, *'Yes, now the atmosphere is changed. It is nice and enjoyable. We communicate better. The programme taught me that men and women are equal. I've changed. I now help my wife in the home. Now when I have money I give it to my wife. She*

checks with me and we decide together how to spend it.'

The couple's daughter, Cabangani (17), has also noticed the change in her parents. *'Before, they never really showed their love to each other and now they really show it.'*

Things have also improved in their intimate relationship. Pauline says, *'Before, sex was a real struggle for me. Now we talk and agree when we are having sex. We use different techniques. It is much better now. I enjoy it thoroughly'*. This change has helped to transform their marriage.





Couples who participated in the pilot project said they had a better relationship as a result.

agency could be seen as patronising or paternalistic.

In Zimbabwe, CAT recruited volunteers from local churches, who were trained to continue and follow up this work in their churches and communities. In Burkina Faso, Vigilance used its entire staff team to engage in the baseline survey. This enabled staff to see for themselves the issues surrounding gender and HIV, and how their own attitudes were shaped. As a result staff became convinced of the issue and decided that they themselves need to change and model better behaviour.

'The most important thing I learned was how much the weight of tradition influenced our relationship. I have to admit that it helped just to see how our behaviour followed tradition.'

Pastor, Vivalgo village, Burkina Faso

Biblical aspects of gender

To engage churches and church leaders, the programme had to be biblically-based and address key Bible passages often used to justify gender inequalities. Many of the cultural expectations of men and women come from misinterpretations of these passages.

A common misconception is that a wife cannot refuse sex with her husband. In

fact, the Bible verses (1 Corinthians 7:3-5) often used to justify this view do not say this – rather they say that sex should be by mutual consent, in equal partnership. Just as the man has rights over his wife's body, equally the woman has rights over her husband's body.

One of the most-debated issues when it comes to the biblical view on relationships between men and women is the concept of the man as 'head' (Ephesians 5:21-33). In both Burkina Faso and Zimbabwe, this concept is used to indicate the authority that the man assumes when he gets married and to justify male power and control over women and in the home. However, the verses actually emphasise the love and responsibility owed by the husband to his wife.

Using Bible studies (see page 5) and facilitated discussion groups, the pilot project opened up debate around these concepts, inviting participants to look afresh at the scriptural passages, the original context and meaning of the words, and the basis for their beliefs. It did not necessarily change the theological views of all the participants, but provided space and a positive motivation to challenge and change how this understanding is outworked in practice within their own culture.

Case study

Daniel is a church pastor in Burkina Faso. He and his wife Marie participated in the marriage training workshop run by Vigilance.

Daniel described the impact of the training, saying, *'Now many things have changed in my family. I sit together with my wife, and it has become easy to discuss things. This changes what we do. It creates agreement. Lots of things have changed with our intimate relationship. Before there was no discussion about sexual needs, it was the man who decided. Now, needs are expressed without shame within the couple, as it concerns us both.'*

His wife Marie agreed. *'What we have noticed is that before we did not have the chance to chat or discuss things with our husbands, but with this training it is now possible. We have noticed that now we understand each other well, there is harmony in the relationship.'*

When asked how these changes came about, Daniel emphasised that the spiritual component of the workshops was transformational, saying, *'Prayer and God's Word helped us to change. The training made things clear because it was based on the Bible.'*

The changes were confirmed by neighbours, one of whom commented, *'I think a change occurred in their life. As an example, in the past, a little thing could make men lose their temper, there are certain things men did not do. I can see that with the teachings, things have changed. In all their behaviour, it is now harmony in the couple. In the past, the weight of culture was leading them to behave exactly as the culture says you should do, this is no longer happening with the pastor and his wife.'*

Daniel and Marie's church leader further confirmed this, saying, *'A great change can be noticed in their daily life. About Daniel and Marie, in their life as a couple, everything is well; the teaching is like a mirror, as you look in, you know what you have to do.'*

Examples of Bible studies

SEXUAL HEALTH

Read Genesis 1:27-2:25

Sex is often a taboo subject, surrounded by silence and denial. As Christians we should ask ourselves: 'What is God's plan for human sexuality?' The Bible is not silent on the topic of sex, but rather points out some important aspects of the issue:

Sex is God's creation. It was God's idea to create people as both male and female, and unite them through sex (Genesis 2:24). Both men and women are created with sexual desire.

Sex is good. Sex was part of God's good creation (Genesis 1:31). Sex is designed to provide pleasure and satisfaction (Song of Songs 4:10). Men and women are both given the gift of being able to experience pleasure and delight within marriage. This enriches and deepens the love relationship between the couple. Yet in some cultures women are not expected to take pleasure in sex.

Sex is designed for marriage. God's purpose for human beings is that men and women should experience a life-long, faithful, permanent and responsible relationship. These conditions are met within the context of marriage. It is there that God blesses

and approves this union. In Genesis 1:28 the command to 'bear fruit and multiply' is obeyed through the sexual relationship.

- What does our society say about sex? How does this passage challenge these attitudes?
- What messages does the church give to people about sex?
- How can relationships be transformed in the light of this passage?

Unfortunately people do not always choose to follow God's plan. In our broken world there are many problems such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual violence, broken families and harmful relationships. The church should not hide from this reality. Its responsibility is to be salt and light for the world, and to speak the truth in love, in order to encourage sexual health in communities across the world.

Adapted from a Bible study by Dr Jorge Patpatian, published in Footsteps 69: Sexual Health (2006), Tearfund.

Available from www.tearfund.org/tilz

MEN, WOMEN AND GOD

It is easy to let our own cultural ideas and assumptions influence our understanding of biblical texts. For example, the idea that men are called to lead in the church, and women only to follow, has dominated the thinking about gender for centuries. This is in spite of the large list of women leaders whom Paul greets in the last chapter of Romans. It's also in spite of the fact that he refers to Phoebe, who has taken the letter to Rome, as a minister. He uses exactly the same Greek word for her (*diaconos*) that he uses to describe his own ministry, and that of Timothy.

We need help from the Bible to understand God's plans for all areas of our lives, including sexual relationships. Throughout the world, women are very vulnerable to sexual violence, such as rape. Even within marriage there can be violence, often justified by some misguided Christians who hold the view that wives are in subjection to their husbands, and this includes in sexual relationships. Paul, however, has very different ideas.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:2-7

This passage challenges our attitudes to the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. First of all, Paul places it firmly within the commitment of marriage. Next, marriage is always to be between one man and one woman. Already, those two provisions are protective towards women.

But the most radical part comes when Paul talks about sex between husband and wife. The wife does not have authority

over her own sexuality, but her husband does – nothing surprising about that. The surprising thing is the next sentence. The husband does not have authority over his sexuality either – but his wife does. This is dramatic indeed. It is the only passage where Paul uses the actual word 'authority' within the marriage relationship, and it is to be entirely mutual. Husbands and wives are to consider each other's bodies with respect and consideration. If this biblical teaching were followed in sexual relationships throughout the world, it would mean an end to so much human brokenness, sexual violence and sex-related epidemics, including HIV.

- What does this passage tell us about the New Testament view on people having more than one sexual partner?
- Why is this view protective towards women?
- What happens to the idea of gender inequality in this passage?
- What are Paul's underlying principles in the sexual relationship between husband and wife?
- What stops the worldwide church from living out this vision for men and women?

Adapted from a Bible study by Dr Elaine Storkey, published in Footsteps 66: Human rights (2006), Tearfund.

Available from www.tearfund.org/tilz

Workshop session

Gender and gender roles

ACTIVITY 1 | What is Gender?

Introduce the topic by asking participants to discuss or write down on pieces of paper the differences between men and women. Then ask them to divide their answers into biological differences and social differences. Provide participants with clear definitions which show how 'sex' and 'gender' are different.

Sex describes the biological and genetic differences between males and females. Only females menstruate, get pregnant, give birth to children and breastfeed. The differences are the work of nature, they are the same in all cultures and cannot be changed. Christians believe this is how God created men and women.

Gender describes the differences in the way that males and females are expected to behave: their dress, the work they do, the way that they speak and behave, and their status. These differences are created by society not nature. They are part of a culture and over time they can change. For Christians, the goal is to discover what God intended for both men and women, to grow into the likeness of Christ.

Since people create gender roles, people can also change them

ACTIVITY 2 | Gender roles

Divide participants into four groups, so there are two groups of men and two groups of women. The first group of men and the first group of women should each discuss and make a list of how men spend the day. This could be done by drawing a picture or writing the word for each activity, then placing a number of stones on the picture to show how many hours is spent on it. The second group of men and the second group of women do the same, but this time each group focuses on women's daily activities. Bring all the groups back together to discuss the differences.

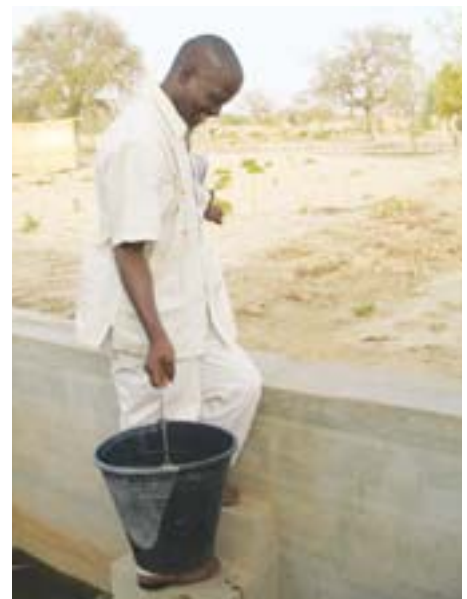
The facilitator could also read the case study 'Mr Moyo' (see box). Or ask participants to read as a role-play, and then discuss.

Gender roles describe what men and women are expected to do. For example a man is expected to cut down trees and a woman to cook. Gender roles vary across different cultures, they are created by society and can change over time in response to new circumstances or ideas. These roles are actually interchangeable - for example, both men and women are physically able to cook.

Since people create gender roles, people can also change them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the good and bad effects of these different gender roles on the lives of men and women in our community?
- Do you think the differences are fair? How would you like to change them?



Gender roles are based on cultural expectations and can change.

ACTIVITY 3 | Stereotypes

Ask participants to quickly list ten words to describe what a woman is like, and then ten more to describe what a man is like. Then discuss the words people have chosen.

Some of these words may reflect cultural **stereotypes**. Stereotypes are fixed and over-simplified ideas that all people from a certain group behave in the same way and have the same characteristics. Many stereotypes are negative and can form the basis of prejudice or discrimination against individuals. Stereotypes can be formed by social institutions such as the family, church, school, community, political parties, and by mass media, such as newspapers, TV, radio.

Gender stereotyping is when women and men are always expected to behave in a certain way. For example, in many cultures, men are expected to be strong and make decisions and women are expected to be submissive and follow them. Gender stereotyping limits what women and men are able to do in their lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look at the list of words. What impact do stereotypes have on our behaviour and expectations of men and women in our society?
- Think about how we bring up children. How do social stereotypes affect the development of the girl child and the boy child differently, for example at school?
- What were the traditional ideas about how men and women should behave in our grandparents' time? What are young people's ideas about how they should behave now? How have these ideas changed?
- What is the role of the church in changing harmful stereotypes?



How do social stereotypes affect how boys and girls are brought up?

CASE STUDY | Mr Moyo

'What is your job?' asked the pastor.

'I am a farmer' replied Mr Moyo.

'Do you have any children?'

'Yes, we have nine children.'

'Does your wife work?'

'No, she stays at home.'

'I see. How does she spend her day?'

'Well, she gets up at four in the morning, fetches water and wood, makes the fire, cooks breakfast and cleans the homestead. She then goes to the river and washes

clothes. Once a week she walks to the grinding mill. After that she goes to the township with the smallest children, where she sells tomatoes by the roadside while she knits. She buys what she wants from the shops. Then she cooks the midday meal.'

'You come home at midday?'

'No no, she brings the meal to me about three kilometres away.'

'And after that?'

'She stays in the field to do the weeding, and then goes to the vegetable garden to water.'

'What do you do?'

'I must go and discuss business and drink with the men in the village.'

'And after that?'

'I go home for supper which my wife has prepared.'

'Does she go to bed after supper?'

'No, I do. She has things to do around the house until 9 or 10pm.'

'But I thought you said your wife does not work.'

'Of course she does not work! She stays at home.'

ACTIVITY 4 Gender and HIV

The facilitator can encourage participants to discuss how gender roles and stereotypes can increase both men and women's vulnerability to HIV. They may discuss how society contributes to these vulnerabilities through cultural expectations and official structures, and how things could be changed to make people less vulnerable.

This chart could be filled in, to represent these vulnerabilities, for both men and women in marriage, within the extended family, and within wider society. The examples below are taken from a workshop in Zimbabwe.

GENDER ISSUES	SOCIAL NORMS	INSTITUTIONAL MAINTENANCE	CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF INCREASED HIV INFECTION RISK
Female vulnerability			
In marriage <i>For example:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to refuse male demands for sexual intercourse. • Unable to negotiate safer sexual relations, including condom use. 	Duty of the wife to obey.	Courts may not acknowledge existence of rape within marriage.	Woman cannot protect herself from infection if her partner is living with HIV.
Woman required to produce children for her husband.	View of the woman as a child-bearer.	Family planning needs husband's permission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot use condoms to protect from HIV. • Increased risk of children being born with HIV.
Within extended family <i>For example:</i> Sexual 'cleansing' of a widow.	Traditional beliefs and rituals around death.	Practice perpetuated by local courts.	Widow may contract HIV from brother-in-law or vice versa.
Within wider society <i>For example:</i> Women provide majority of health care at home and in hospitals.	Nursing seen as a female role and profession.	Gender discrimination in school and college curriculum.	Women more at risk through providing care.
Male vulnerability			
<i>For example:</i> Concept of 'manhood' linked to sexual experience.	Men are expected to have several sexual partners - peer pressure on adolescent boys to be sexually active.	Polygamy is legal.	Men placed at increased risk of infection through multiple or concurrent sexual partners, and if living with HIV can infect several women.
Etc	Etc	Etc	Etc

This workshop session is adapted from Christian AIDS Taskforce Church Family Relationships Manual (2007), with additional information from Our Future: Sexuality and life skills education for young people, International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2007), available to download from www.aidsalliance.org

Challenges

Some of the challenges faced during this pilot project were:

THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

CAT and Vigilance both have distinct theological views, which are in many aspects different to Tearfund's view, although all share the same basis of faith. Tearfund did not impose its theology of gender on the partner organisations. Instead they worked together to resolve any disagreements, based on the common understanding that every person is made in the image of God, and a recognition of the need to tackle the abuse, including sexual abuse within marriage, linked in part to misuse of scripture.

This pilot project found that the very act of opening up controversial or taboo issues to honest discussion through Bible study and facilitated group discussion could be transformational. Hearing different experiences and perspectives had an impact on the participants' behaviour and practice, even where disagreements remained about the theological understanding of specific verses.

TACKLING SENSITIVE ISSUES

People often find it difficult to talk openly about controversial or taboo issues, like sex. Good facilitation is essential to create a safe, open discussion that can bring to the surface the underlying attitudes and opinions that shape people's thoughts and actions. If the debate becomes aggressive and confrontational it creates an atmosphere of fear which prevents others from participating.

It is best if the church leader does not facilitate the discussion themselves, as they hold a position of authority. As such, the congregation may not feel able to be as open and honest in their debates as they might otherwise be. Where possible, the facilitator should be someone external to the church, with excellent communication skills, who can help mediate the discussion and ensure everyone has a chance to speak.

If the discussion groups are mixed, space and respect must be given to enable both women and men to participate meaningfully in the discussion. If this does not seem possible, then use separate male and female groups, but it is essential that these groups come back together to share their findings and discussions. These can be fed back as a group, so that no one individual can be targeted for a response.

CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Over the two year pilot period Zimbabwe experienced a rapid decline in its economy, desperate food and fuel shortages, lack of medical care and the erosion of state welfare provision. The programme had to adapt to these changing circumstances. The original aim was to reach groups of men at work, but rising unemployment (at 80 per cent by the end of the pilot phase) meant finding alternative ways to meet men where they now gathered, at football matches for example.

Key learning

Taking a **holistic approach** to the programme and focusing on life skills and relationships, provided an entry

'Our relationships with the young women have improved. We now let them talk and give them respect.'

Young man, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

point to talk about gender and HIV. It gave participants a positive motivation to change their attitudes and behaviour, as they focused on their future life. This has restored hope, especially in young people. At the end of each workshop, participants discussed and made personal commitments for the future, in terms of behaviour change and life goals. They were encouraged to be specific and set realistic deadlines and targets for reaching what they want to achieve.

Basic relationship training, including discussing issues of parenting, communication, sex and conflict resolution, has improved relationships among the



For many participants, the realisation that gender roles can and do change was transformational.



Good facilitation is essential to help groups discuss controversial issues.

couples who participated. Talking about sex in a positive way, as a gift from God for both husband and wife to enjoy, has improved couples' relationships. It has also empowered women to have more say in their relationship and be able to negotiate, refuse or initiate sex which, in some cultures, is seen as taboo. Participating in the programme has also enabled couples to talk about otherwise taboo subjects – such as condom use in the context of their relationship

Providing a **biblical understanding** of relationships has been fundamental to the impact of this programme in a society where the church has much power and influence in the local community. Openly discussing difficult theological passages on gender enabled participants to see assumptions they have made, and recognise where these are based on cultural norms. The theological perspective on gender, that women are equally made in the image of God and therefore of equal value to

men, restored a sense of self-worth and confidence amongst the women and increased respect for women amongst the men.

'My relationship has changed with my sisters. We were taught God made us equal. Now I respect them and they respect me.'

Young man, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

A key distinctive of this pilot was that it was **locally-led**. Tearfund provided training on gender concepts and initiated the process, but it aimed not to impose a theological understanding or dictate which approaches the local partner organisations should take. There was freedom to design and implement a programme that the local staff thought would be most culturally-relevant. The involvement of key stakeholders such as local chiefs, officials and church leaders from the start was vital to ensure they supported what was communicated to the church and community.

For participants, **the realisation that gender roles are negotiable** was transformational. Understanding that gender roles can and do change enabled them to begin the process of adapting their own culture from within.

Tearfund organised comprehensive **prayer support** for the work, including a monthly prayer meeting and prayer email open to all staff to pray specifically for the project and the people involved. Tearfund believes prayer was a vital part of the pilot project's success.

Impact

During the review of the pilot project, participants in focus groups were asked to discuss the 'most significant change'. In both rural and urban groups, people reported increased testing for HIV, changed behaviour in both men and women, including a reduction in multiple or concurrent partners, and increased discussion within relationships about love and sexuality. In urban areas, groups reported increased condom use. Young people said they no longer saw HIV as a death sentence. In Zimbabwe, many people spoke of increased hope for the future; that despite the current economic difficulties, the improvement in their relationships gave them a basis to move forward in hope.

'What we didn't know we now know. It has given us empowerment. We now talk to each other and make decisions together about the household, it has very much helped in my family.'

Woman, Vipalogo village, Burkina Faso

Couples said they had experienced reduced tension in the home, better communication, less aggressive arguments, improved sex lives, and a better relationship as a result of participating in the programme.

However, tackling deep-rooted traditions is a difficult and sensitive long-term process. While most of the women said they now felt empowered and were able

A biblical perspective on gender recognises that we are all unique human beings, and that men and women are both created with equal value, in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Gender inequalities and socially-constructed 'roles' can restrict both men and women from fully using their skills and talents, and damage relationships between them. They can prevent people from realising their full potential as individuals, and growing as men and women into the fullness of life in Christ. Every individual, males and females of all ages, should be encouraged and enabled to reach their potential and so be able to contribute positively to the home, church and society as a whole.

'Sex is a great medicine in our marriage. I can initiate it now without feeling ashamed. The results are fantastic. It's like we are young again.'

Female pastor, Zimbabwe

to negotiate and discuss sex with their husbands, some women still felt as though they had no choice but to say yes when their husbands wanted it. It was recognised that cultural change takes time, and this pilot project is only a start.

'Concerning dialogue between the two of us, it goes well, but ... as the family leader, to let my wife know everything about my income and what I do with it, I still can't do this. At this level the change is slow, even as a pastor.'

Pastor, Vipalgo village, Burkina Faso

The number of participants in this pilot project was relatively small, and the review findings are qualitative,

but the transformation evident at the individual level is considerable. All the men participating in the evaluation of the programme stated that they now saw women as equals, and during the evaluation in Burkina Faso, the men demonstrated this by serving the women lunch, which is completely counter-cultural.

Conclusion

Working with the local church is key to addressing gender inequality, which is one of the fundamental drivers of the HIV epidemic. In taking a biblical and relationships-based approach to gender, pastors and church congregations have been able to openly discuss and debate cultural traditions and social norms that have previously restricted both women and men from reaching their full potential in life.

An understanding of God's original intentions for the partnership between men and women has helped transform relationships. Participants have been given a positive motivation to challenge and change their own attitudes and behaviour, and realise their ability to transform their own culture.



Young people who participated in this pilot in Zimbabwe said they now had increased hope for the future.

Gender, HIV and the church: a case study

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency building a global network of local churches to help eradicate poverty.



Above: Participants in Zimbabwe.

Back cover: Girls and boys can be brought up to respect and value each other.

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