



Faith in development: Gender and equality

Season 2, episode 9

Progressing towards gender justice

Transcript

Summary keywords

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Speakers

Sabine Nkusi, Uwezo

Sabine Nkusi

Welcome back to season two of the *Faith in development* podcast brought to you by Tearfund. My name is Sabine Nkusi and I'm your host for our final conversation of the season. It has been a year since we launched this season on gender and protection and what a year it has been. So we'll be finishing the season in the same way we started, in conversation with members of Tearfund's Gender and Protection Unit, reflecting on these past 12 months. You will hear from three of my colleagues, Solange Mbonigaba, who leads our Survivor Movement work and she's based in South Africa, Nina Somera, Gender-based Violence and Emergency Specialist who's based in the Philippines, and Uwezo Lele, Masculinities Advisor who will be speaking to us from the Tearfund office in the DRC. We'll be talking about the things that inspired us, challenged us, and also gave us hope. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

So hi, team. I cannot believe it's been a year since we last recorded and since we had the first conversation on this podcast. Looking back, we've explored so many themes during the season. Some of those themes have been around what is Stefan's approach to ending sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), we've looked at what is 'Transforming Masculinity' as an approach, we've looked at the 'Journey to Healing' as an approach. We've had some incredible people come and speak with us some incredible and interesting women. Esperande, who's the co-lead of the Phephisa movement in South Africa, and we've had Reverend Martha as well, who leads a small organisation. We've had so many people who are experts working around

GBV. We've also looked at women's leadership, and what it means to run an organisation. For the last episode of the season on gender and protection, I wanted us to reflect back over the year. We had our first conversation in November 2021 and now we're in November 2022. Over the last year, what would you say you have seen in the work that we do as a team, even in Tearfund, that has inspired you? And I'd love to start with Nina.

Nina Somera

Thank you, Sabine. I think what always inspires me are the opportunities when they get to work with people with a premium on quality and integrity, especially when they are working under difficult circumstances. It is inspiring, for instance, knowing how individuals and groups themselves affected by crisis organise themselves to protect and support each other. We have heard a lot of volunteer groups which emerged in the aftermath of a conflict in Ukraine. The burnout among them is quite real.

Sabine Nkusi

Absolutely, absolutely. I think the people that we meet and we work with are going through so many difficulties, but at the same time really working tirelessly to make a better life. Solange, what would you say has inspired you over the last year in our work?

Solange Mbonigawa

Ah, first and foremost, we were able to meet face-to-face after three years of COVID-19 where we had lost hope that we will make it and as a team. Finally, we met, and that was really something that enthused us, especially with me being a person who likes social gatherings. The second thing that inspired me was to think further about how we can be more meaningful in the lives of the communities and families and the individuals that we support, to focus on them. The aftermath of COVID had really exacerbated the issues of sexual gender based violence (SGBV), the cases have increased drastically. For us as a team to respond with the robust strategies and the energy to increase more of what we were using, if it's resources needed, if it's a time, it needed more, everything needed **more**. But the good thing that came out, in my own view, is when I have seen survivors still with the hope for life, that inspired me. And even if there were no resources, the voice of survivors saying 'we are ready to speak, we are ready to stand, we are ready to do things on our own with our own resources' inspired me more. That is how we're able to support them to come up with a name like in one of the countries, they were able to create a network to show that they are committed. If we can come in, they are ready. Thank you, that inspired me a lot.

Sabine Nkusi

No, thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you so much. And Uwezo, how about you? What is that has inspired you?

Uwezo Bagulele

Yeah, thanks, Sabine. One of the things I want to share here, it's about the excitement internally in Tearfund about the different interventions we are doing on SGBV, especially for transforming masculinities. I've seen a lot of demands from many, many countries within our organisation and outside of our organisation. For example, this year, we were asked to facilitate the training of trainers for an external partner with 'Action Nairobi'. And I believe that transforming masculinity is a good approach to achieve the vision Tearfund has, and also to help people to restore their relationships, and also to contribute to human rights. Most people have been going through a violation of their rights. And the other aspect is a thematic focus we have developed and this will help us maybe, you know, to go deeper into what we are really doing, and to see if it's possible to build off what we have been doing in the past and to see how to improve the different work we did. And also some adaptations needed to be done, according to the lesson we have observed in the past.

Sabine Nkusi

Thank you very much. I think there is quite a lot there. And I think personally for me, what I will say has inspired me over the last year, I think it's this team, the Gender and Protection Unit. I am always in awe of the incredible talent and expertise that we have in this team. And the level of humility, integrity that we have as a team and all the team members from you know, Uwezo, Solange, Nina, Francesca, Luke and Mary, but just really seeing how we work together and how we're passionate about the work that we're doing and that we do, you know, we do our best. I think, so long as you mentioned, the fact that we met in Nairobi, we met as a team at the beginning of this year. It was really an opportunity to come together, meet physically hug, you know, dance together and just really celebrate, but also plan for the way forward. So I feel really inspired. And it's such a privilege for me to actually lead this team. And the other thing that inspired me over the last year is the women that we work with who are working tirelessly in difficult circumstances. The women Nina talked about in the Ukraine, the women in South Sudan, the women in the DRC. In Mali, in Chad, in Nepal, in various countries where Tearfund has been working to address the issue of sexual and gender based violence, they inspire me, they inspired me, and they really are the reason why we do this work. We have been inspired, but I presume we have also been challenged, isn't it, by what we have seen. So other things that have challenged you, over the last year in our work, if we start with you, Uwezo?

Uwezo Bagulele

Yes, there were many, many challenges, especially relate to travelers, for example, this year, I was invited to attend the Sexual Violence Research Initiative conference in Mexico, but I was not able to travel, do you have Visa constraints, the same thing happened while I was able to travel, I was planned to travel through Bangladesh. Also, the visa was another issue. So despite these challenges, I think there are other challenges we are trying to, to solve, like, you know, working remotely when it's possible, and also to make a good plan. The other challenge is about the high demand of you know, supporting countries, for example, internally and externally, unfortunately, to fund. So that's the big challenge I faced. And I think in the coming months or weeks, you know, we'll be able to address all these challenges, as we are making a good plan to

have more people who will be trained on the transforming masculinity.

Sabine Nkusi

Thank you, thank you. And I think that's quite an important point that you're making. The fact that, you know, the demand and the need is so great, that sometimes the resources that we have around us are not enough it can be resources in terms of finances, funding, or it can be resources in terms of people who actually doing this work and as a, as a master trainer on *Transforming Masculinities*, you are constantly in demand. And, and we hope that, you know, we can create, I suppose, you know, we can develop more people like us so that, you know, that demand can be met. You know, how about you? Is there anything that has challenged you over the last year, in terms of the work that we do?

Nina Somera:

I think the main challenge for me is in one word 'investments', serious investments on gender justice that put women's rights really at the center of the work that we do. And, and I guess that is symptomatic of, of how organisations also adapt with, with pressures from the outside. So for example, when we use gender as a strategy, sometimes as a process, we miss gender as an analytical concept, we fail to see GBV as a product of gender inequality, we sometimes divorce it from social movements, or even histories. We ended up sometimes with a dilution of the advocacy around it and its intersections. Sometimes I feel that this also keeps us from being outspoken in articulating human rights, we're encouraged from protection at the time when there is a lot of pushback against the gains that women's rights have made. So there are still some challenges with regard to addressing people's access, especially women's access to our rights and people's access to their sense of security.

Sabine Nkusi:

No, absolutely. Absolutely. I think the word 'investment' that you've just said is is really critical. And these are constant conversations that I guess we have in Tearfund but also externally. I suppose other organisation also think about that, you know, how do we invest a better and intentionally as well? Solange, how about you, anything that has challenged you?

Solange Mbonigawa:

Definitely. I've been challenged to define what you build on. Nina just shared around investment. For me, I'm not taking the same line here but I go on how I observe the struggle at the community level. The community said they are under pressure, the cost of life has gone too high. And because our investment is so limited, you find impact is always a challenge, because you find a person crying, and you almost leaving a person crying, how does that affect you as a person, it's really a big challenge on my side. And the second part of my challenge, this work that we do, it shouldn't be seen as a project, you know, a project is that in the end, as it's just modelling you know, it's an approach that needed to be embedded in the life of an

individual that really affirmed by the level of transformation. Therefore, it cannot be defined as a project, it is a process, a continuous process, whether it's transforming masculinity, whether its journey to healing, it's, it's a continuous process, a person or a community, or a church has to step in. And then they continue with that. And that is linked with the challenge data is so maybe at the organisational level, where countries offices are not able to retain good staff, go to staff who have really started equipped to, to supervise or to genuinely partner to do things. And the next minute you have that person is gone. And then when you are an advisor or someone who build the capacity of the country, staff or partners, you find you you keep on starting, the work is not moving forward, that has been a big challenge. And I believe if we were to move forward, we needed to find a way to ensure that those people that we build the capacity to take over or to lead this work in the country at the country level or community level, we need to be strategic on how to return them.

Sabine Nkusi:

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much, Solange. Yes, building capacity and supporting the different countries where we work? You know, I think it's also about investment, what you were talking about how you invest in sometimes you don't necessarily see the return. So real challenge to us. So I think for me, two things, challenge me during this year. The challenge that I've had, and that I have been reflecting on is, you know, how can we ensure that as an organisation, or even as a, you know, as a team, that we work more intentionally with women-led organisations, because the reality is that these women who are leading these organisations really hard, don't have enough resources. They don't have enough opportunities, I suppose in terms of funding, etc. But because organisation has to fund, we do have those opportunities. So the challenge for me has been, you know, how can, how can we be more intentional, you know, in Tearfund to work more with those organisations and those partners and really collaborate better, because they're doing really amazing work. It's just that that work isn't showcased in the right way. So, a real challenge for us. We have been inspired and we've been challenged, and there are so many things that give you hope.

Nina Somera:

To be honest, this is not a very good time for, for the women, considering from where we came from. For example, when we think of that decade of conferences, we were able to rekindle a lot of our visions. Those of us who identify with these movements have seen a lot of setbacks this year, but also games, but I still have hope in women and especially coming from the communities because even though we're not seeing a movement that resembles what it used to be in the past, I think there is also some diversification that's happening. So, maybe our task is to really nurture whenever there are some women leaders that are emerging, especially the younger leaders, especially those that are coming from the communities, because these are the women who are actually operating based on their grit, and their guts. I think that's one area of hope that I want to always focus on.

Sabine Nkusi:

Thank you. Yes, definitely. It was anything that you see as hope.

Uwezo Lele:

The hope for the work we are doing is to see the partner we are working with, especially the local church, how the church is committed to taking this work forward and how the faith leaders and community leaders are engaged when they are trained, and committed to the work, especially at community level. And they agree that, you know, the church should play more than what they are doing. So this is something which is giving hope, when they are aware of the problem of the issue of gender inequality of a issue of SGBV in the community, they can take the responsibility, you know, of moving this work forward. So this is a big hub I'm seeing in the community we are working in. And the other aspect, it's about, you know, this kind of workout for many, many networks, which are now coming up in different from different contexts, can see NGOs, we can see women Association associations, and everyone is more involved in how we can find the solution, or how can end this issue. So this is giving hope, say, one day, you know, we'll find solution to the problem. So, and this is really an encouragement, saying that we need to continue to do it.

Sabine Nkusi:

Thank you so much. Thank you. Solange, how about you?

Solange Mbonigawa:

And for me, the hope comes from God, always. Other than that, what we see with our eyes, it's a bit challenging, especially when it comes on those which the challenges that we mentioned. But I know God is saying Fear not for I am with you, then that becomes a strong support for me as an individual. But when it comes on the program on its own, I've seen women not giving up, they don't give up. They headed enough, they are ready to do anything to improve on the life of the next generation. Therefore, I don't have it to fear if these women who are happening to have victimized or, you know, abused it standing on their two feet and saying no, we are here we don't want what happened to our children. That what happened to us to happen to our children, then why should I fear the hope is they needed that we needed to be again strategic and find a way to invest more, but there is a hope, another area that increase them. The hope on my side is Uwezo mentioned that the role of the church interfacing with the government. If they come together, there is enough resource that can really support us to do what we are doing where and and the consigns really ready to achieve impact that will be filled in felt by everyone at the community level.

Sabine Nkusi:

Thank you very much. Thank you. So I think on my side, I will say what really gives me hope is is that the younger generation, as Nina mentioned, so recently I was at we were at a conference, the Sexual Violence

Research Initiative forum in September and I was moderating a panel on the issue of female genital mutilation or cutting. And one of the speaker the panelists, a young woman really spoke powerfully about what she's doing. A community to, to end this practice of female genital mutilation or cutting. And what she was saying is that you need to listen to us, you need to listen to the voice of young people. Because people think that young people do not have solutions. But actually, we do have solutions on issues that affect us. So we need to really listen to our soul. It's is the voice is the young women like that. So her name is Natalie, younger women like Natalie, who are doing this work, who are engaged and interested. Just seeing them really gives me hope that we can end this. We know as you know that we are we also about to start the 16 days of activism against gender based violence. And for our audience, this is a global campaign that takes place every year. And it starts on the 25th of November, which is the International Day Against Violence Against Women, and ends on the 10th of December, which is the International Human Rights Day. And as a team, we usually are quite busy around this time of the year supporting countries but also during various various things. So I wanted to, to to ask, you know, what, what is it that we can do to encourage people to do during this time during this 16 days? So how can we encourage people to to act? What is the kind of call-to-action during the 16 days for the audience, listening to us? Or even, you know, anyone? Is there anything that we might encourage them to do during this time?

Uwezo Lele:

Yeah, I think what I can ask people to do is to reflect on how they are doing to combat this violence, which is happening around us. It's something which is happening our families, it's happening at church level chap in our communities. So if it can be a personal question, How am I contributing to end this issue? This will be a good question to start. And to check if something's wrong, or something related to SGBV is happening around me. And how can I also stop that? This is the first point so that I think it's good for people to to be cautious of the problem, then we can found a solution together.

Sabine Nkusi:

Yeah, thank you. Thank you very much, Nina.

Nina Somera:

16 days of activism is an opportunity to highlight gender based violence, but we shouldn't be limited to the events alone. So, instead, let's focus on the processes. Something that lasts beyond the 16 days of activism. Because otherwise, if we focus on events, it's so easy to forget about them after November 25. By December there's another international day. And after that, there would be other international day. I would rather focus on our strengths where we can contribute, and see that as a work in progress, something that goes beyond all of these events, but something that can also contribute to the other processes that are happening around us.

Sabine Nkusi:

Thank you, thank you. And I think that's really important. Actually, I remember being in a meeting with one of the survivors from the Phephisa network, during the last 16 days, I think, last year, and they were really challenging us saying that in the 16 days we should not be talking about GBV only during the 16 days, we should talk about all of these throughout the year and not just limit us to those 16 days. So thank you for bringing that back again. Solange?

Solange Mbonigawa:

Yes, I agree with the wisdom. It's everyone's responsibility to end the GBV gender based violence. I agree with the Nina, we need to evaluate ourselves how best and how far what is been working, what has been not working. This is a time not just to educate people, but because everyone has reached to the point. They say majority, what is the as the actors, what is it that I'm doing is individual today or what am I planning? How am I thinking to engage with the Facebook messaging or tweet, to ensure that I'm playing my my role I'm doing my part in ending in trying to carry down the GBV. Because during the 16 days of activism, we see so many messages and they are contradicting some people are throwing some not really good messages related to the issues of GBV. And you find people are silent. Once you are there and you are silent, remember, you are also a perpetrator in one way or another. Then my message is, you do your part, I do my part.

Sabine Nkusi:

No, thank you very much. Thank you. I think for me, there's so much that we can do. During these 16 days we know that violence against women is a global issue. It does not happen just in countries where tier one works, but it's a global issue. And I really want to encourage our listeners, maybe those who are not based in some of these countries where they fund works, to really start to start some critical conversations around gender equality, because I think change really takes place at multiple levels. But it's key that we all play our part in advancing gender equality. And we can start this and nothing has been talked about, we can start this, you know, simply in our own personal spaces, in our homes, in our families, with our partners and spouses with children, even those that we care for. And just ask really simple questions. You know, for instance, like as a father, how do I interact with my children? You know, both boys and girls, and as a mother, am I upholding some norms which are actually harmful to my children, both men and both boys and girls? Just really asking simple questions to reflect and it can be done at a at multiple levels. Wow. Well, thank you so much, team, I think, just really to conclude, it's been a great year. We have all been inspired, challenged, but also we have seen and we see the hope, we see what God has done and can do in the lives of the many people that we work with.

There you have it. I hope you have enjoyed journeying with us over the last year, as we told and heard stories of courage and hope in our quest to end sexual and gender based violence and promoting gender equality. In the meantime, if you want to know more about our work, or catch up on previous episodes of the faith and development podcast from this season, or our first season on peacebuilding, you can do so by visiting learn.tearfund.org. We look forward to seeing you for season three. Thank you so much for listening.

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