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

Mandy Marshall - Tearfund

Micah SE Asia Conference
Genting Highlands, Malaysia
Oct 2007
What prompted the 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?

‘It is impossible to realise our goals while discriminating against half the human race’ - Koffi Annan 2006
What did Tearfund do?

Applied for and was successful in gaining internal Innovations funding to undertake some research into:

*The affects and influence of the church on gender relations and sexual rights within the context of the evangelical church community within Africa.*

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What’s your place in restoring justice?
It is impossible to realise our goals while discriminating against half the human race

– Kofi Annan 2006

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
Findings

- Not much information or resources available on gender, HIV and the church
- NGOs/KZN Uni beginning to recognise that this is a serious gap in work and thinking through more work in this area
- Few NGOs tackled the issue and, if they have, no breakthrough with churches
- Real sense of heaviness in trying to work with and change church attitudes

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Findings Continued…

- Local church communities very traditional in their views on gender (in particular with respect to negotiation on sexual activity)
- Churches revert back to traditional African culture under pressure
- Church reflects the culture around them rather than challenging or changing it
- Little understanding of God’s intentions for relationships
- Churches are exacerbating the spread of HIV & AIDS in some areas because of their attitudes to gender

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What’s your place in restoring justice?
Findings continued….  

- Church leaders are unlikely to appreciate difficult situations faced by women and have little authority with men in the community who often don’t attend church  
- Workshops with churches result in surface compliance to save face and then revert back to tradition at home  
- Lack of good leadership training available  
- Poorly equipped leaders  
- Lack of sound Biblical teaching results in poor teaching, if any, on relationships  
- Churches focus on evangelism and converts rather than discipleship and changed behaviour  

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Quotes from the 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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What’s your place in restoring justice?
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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What’s your place in restoring justice?
How are we doing this?

- Working through two local partners for two years
  - Vigilance, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
  - Christian AIDS Taskforce, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
- Urban church and rural community
- Targeted workshops with consistent follow up
- Linking into local theological colleges training pastors
- Rural areas – work with whole community – church, education, businesses, chiefs, health centres
- Ensure men in the community and in the churches are reached
- Regular prayer – monthly prayer meeting and email

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Why are we doing this?

- Tearfund is well placed to undertake the project as an evangelical organisation – it is operating within our niche area
- The church is recognised as a powerful and strong influence on gender relations within Africa
- Tearfund aims to work with & through the church
- If the spread of HIV & AIDS is to be slowed or reversed then the engagement of the church in Africa is crucial
- Challenging and changing attitudes does not happen overnight but we have to begin somewhere

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What’s your place in restoring justice?
One year on – where are we?

CAT, Zimbabwe

- Workshops on HIV now incorporate a gendered aspect
- Women empowered within the church in Zimbabwe
- Gender position paper produced and circulated with local leaders
- Recognition that own organisation needs to change and gender needs to be mainstreamed
- Church leaders slowly engaging with the process
- Zimbabwe situation creating difficulties in operation
- Engaging men is difficult!

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What’s your place in restoring justice?
One year on – Where are we?

Vigilance, Burkina Faso

- Baseline surveys done on attitudes and behaviours
- Couples workshops aimed at restoration of relationships as God intended
- Commitment to prayer
- Real difficulties in getting the project started
- Lack of trained staff to take lead on the role

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One year on – Where are we?

Tearfund

- Paper on research written and published in Oxfam’s Gender and Development journal (available on http://tilz.tearfund.org/Topics/Gender.htm)
- Information sharing and learning review taken place and continuing to encourage
- Communication to peer agencies and government within UK
- Monthly prayer meeting established with additional email prayer group

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How can you get involved?

- What examples of good practice can you share?
- What are the issues in your country, church, household relating to Gender?
- What are the current barriers to overcoming those issues?
- Who are the key stakeholders of power, influence or authority who can lead on or bring about change?
- What possible, realistic solutions are there?
- What positive, alternative, constructs of masculinity can we offer?

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What’s your place in restoring justice?
Reflection and Discussion

- What was new for me in this presentation?
- What did I already know?
- What do I now see differently?
- What new direction will I now take? practically and spiritually?
- What will I commit to doing?
Change can happen!

‘We, as individuals, co-create our culture and environment together. We can choose to contribute to its status quo or challenge and change it. To what part do you want to contribute?’

Mandy Marshall 2007

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What’s your place in restoring justice?
The challenge ahead

A constant question for Tearfund is, How is what we are doing affecting relationships?

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What’s your place in restoring justice?
Legacy of Inequality

‘What we're fundamentally dealing with, then, is a legacy of inequality which drives the virus and leads to the devastation of the women and girls of the continent. The legacy is an omnibus catalogue of women's vulnerability: rape and sexual violence, including marital rape; domestic violence; no sexual autonomy; early marriage of girls to older men; forced marriage; harmful traditional practices, including wife inheritance, widow cleansing, polygamy and female genital mutilation; maternal mortality rates as high as they've ever been; sugar Daddies; illiteracy; lack of educational access (the MDG on gender parity in primary schools has already been missed); designation as legal minors; lack of economic and earning power; lack of rights to own and inherit land or property; lack of representation in parliaments and other elected and appointed bodies. The litany never ends.’

Stephen Lewis, former UN Special Envoy for HIV & AIDS in Africa

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What’s your place in restoring justice?