Tackling HIV and Stigma in Zimbabwe with the Anglican Church

The Church of Zimbabwe Wellness Garden.

The HIV Stigma Reduction Programme
Zimbabwe has been one of the countries most affected by HIV/AIDS, and it remains a serious stigma for those who live with it. Men and women living with HIV face daily discrimination and social exclusion. The stigma surrounding HIV has a profound effect on their lives. They can suffer a breakdown in family relationships, feel isolated and depressed, and even suicidal. The Anglican Church of Zimbabwe recognises that there are people within the Church living with, and affected by, HIV that need support.

The Church offers spiritual and emotional support in the form of prayers, songs and Bible studies, and counselling visits to people's homes. The Church's HIV Stigma Reduction Programme is raising awareness and introducing practical measures for improving the lives of people living with HIV. This programme seeks to strengthen the capacity of church leadership regarding the issue, and to increase counselling and advocacy skills to improve the quality of life of those living with HIV/AIDS. The aim is not just to reduce stigma within the church, but within the workplace, schools, health facilities, families, communities, and within faith-based organisations of all kinds.

The programme includes specific campaigns and outreach efforts in institutions and public places. It helps those working in and educating different communities, and those looking after critically ill people at home. The project is increasing knowledge about the basic facts of HIV/AIDS such as mode of transmission, regressive cultural practices, drivers of stigma and barriers to behavioural change.

Effects of Covid-19 on people living with HIV in Zimbabwe
The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world with catastrophic impacts on people's lives, families, and communities. In Zimbabwe, people living with HIV are facing difficulties in accessing health facilities due to strict lockdown measures. In some areas there are mobile Antiretroviral (ARV) centres running for people who need to restock their supply; however this presents a breach of confidentiality as their HIV status is automatically disclosed to other members of their community. People living with HIV are also facing the problem of food shortages during the pandemic as they are unable to go out to support their livelihoods. Food insecurity brings further negative effects as good nutrition is a key factor for adherence to ARV therapy. This may increase the rate of progression to AIDS and further exacerbate the level of stigma and discrimination.

Along with the rest of our church partners, the Anglican Church of Zimbabwe has experienced challenges with running programme activities during the pandemic. However, they continue to be active in their communities following the devastating social and economic impact.

As well as the HIV Stigma Reduction Programme, the Anglican Church of Zimbabwe have been organising activities to support those in greatest need, including the following:

- Educating the Church and communities on COVID-19
- Using Churches as distribution centres for Personal Protective Equipment
- Establishing virtual groups so that people can stay connected and support each other at this difficult time
- Working in liaison with the National Aids Council to ensure continued access to vital medication for people living with HIV
- Distributing food packages

Thank you from USPG
On behalf of USPG and the Anglican Church of Zimbabwe, thank you so much for your support of the HIV Stigma Reduction Programme. We are grateful for your prayers and your generosity in making the continuation of their work possible. We hope you have enjoyed reading about the life-changing difference that your support makes.

Photos: USPG/Linette Frewin. Registered charity number 234518 J238940 uspg.org.uk
Poverty and Hope Appeal 2021

CMS Local Partner Nevedita Jeevabalan, who is helping to eradicate child abuse, prostitution and exploitation in Sri Lanka.

Nevedita Jeevabalan manages the child protection unit of LEADS, a community development organisation with three centres across Sri Lanka. She is responsible for a programme of advocacy, intervention and rehabilitation for children who have been traumatised through experiences of abuse and exploitation.

A mental health specialist by profession, Nevedita describes her calling to LEADS: “My mission is to show God’s love to children who have been through trauma and abuse. Most children who are referred to LEADS have been abused, abandoned at a young age, and been through various traumatic situations. All through their lives they may never have had a loving, trustworthy adult. Being an ambassador of God’s love for such children is the greatest difference I would like to make in their lives.”

Nevedita is passionately committed to service in her own country and is very aware of the extent of the need. It is only in the last two decades, as taboos have begun to disintegrate, that the prevalence of child exploitation in Sri Lanka has come to light. This in a country whose adult citizens have lived in the shadow of a long civil war for most of their lives, and where violence and trauma are an ingrained part of normal life.

As the coronavirus swept across the world in 2020, Sri Lanka also felt its terrifying effects. Towards the end of the year a second wave of the disease was discovered, and the government was forced to impose restrictions and curfew across a number of the country’s provinces, including Colombo. Restrictions on travel and mass gatherings were put in place and lockdown enforced.

Of course, this meant that Nevedita and her team found their ability to carry out normal operations extremely limited. For the children in the residential centres, already working through trauma of all kinds, lockdown brought its own suffering. They were not allowed visitors, or to see extra volunteers and support staff. This created obvious anxiety and a deep sense of isolation.

Although food and daily necessities were provided for the children, Nevedita and her team recognised that the children needed more than just the basics to remain healthy and stimulated. As well as continuing to provide psychological support, the LEADS team distributed educational and recreational packs for the children. The packs not only gave the children focus and drew them out of lethargic behaviour, but hugely improved their ability to work together in group activities. One worker commented: “We are grateful to LEADS for understanding the main needs of these children and supporting us in this regard. We understand how much your organization cares about the children.”

Sri Lanka is still struggling with the realities of Covid-19. Please pray for all its people, but particularly for the team at LEADS as they seek to provide as consistent support as possible for vulnerable children.

Please pray:

• Pray for the girls and boys who come to LEADS for counselling and support – that they would find help and healing
• Pray for God’s wisdom to lead the team and provide support for the staff
• Pray for continued work with government and for perseverance and patience in dealing with bureaucracy
• Pray for the whole country of Sri Lanka

Photos: Church Mission UK Registered Charity Number 1131655 Company Number 6985330 J238040
Harvesting a brighter future

The impact of climate change in Malawi

Malawi is a country where over 50% of its population live below the national poverty line and where, particularly in rural areas, households face chronic malnutrition. Farmers in Malawi have been heavily affected by climate change. Unpredictable weather means they don’t know when to plant their seeds or how long it will be until the rains will come. Frequent droughts followed by floods makes farming incredibly difficult.

The mighty pigeon pea

Frank Zulu, a farmer in Malawi, knows this reality all too well. He was taught a planting calendar by his grandfather based on the regular seasons – but the ever-changing climate means he can no longer depend on this knowledge. He used to rely on growing maize to feed his family, but this crop is no longer suited to Malawi, and it fails easily when the rains don’t come. Thankfully, this is no longer the reality for Frank thanks to the pigeon pea project.

Pigeon peas (a type of pulse) are a hardy crop that can withstand dry spells and harsh conditions, making them ideal for farmers to grow. They are high in protein, drought resistant, there is no need for fertiliser – in fact, its leaves make the soil more fertile – and the stems can be used for firewood. Nothing of this amazing crop gets wasted.

As a successful pigeon pea farmer, Frank can now provide nutritious food to keep his family healthy. He also grows enough peas to sell and has already used extra income to invest in two goats and new school uniforms and shoes for his children. But while Frank has reaped a plentiful harvest, others have not been so fortunate.

A reliable harvest

However, Christian Aid and its partners are making sure more families reap the benefits available through the pigeon pea project. We are working not only to make sure that families have a reliable crop to survive, but also have important training to help them use that crop to thrive. With your help, this project will continue to support farmers in being able to grow pigeon peas. Your donations will continue to bring farmers together into Farmers’ Clubs, where they will learn vital business skills, and work together to plan their planting to ensure a good balance of crops. Farmers’ Clubs also share marketing techniques and new methods for production and storage of pigeon peas, and members will be trained in negotiating fair prices for their crops.

In a time of climate uncertainty, pigeon peas are a lifeline of food security and an important means to earn a living. Please donate to this years’ Poverty and Hope appeal today and help ensure this life-changing work can continue.

Pigeon pea farmer Frank Zulu. He says: “I have benefitted a lot from pigeon pea farming. I sell surplus production to obtain income which helps me purchase household items.”

Pigeon peas are a hardy crop that thrives in tough conditions. They are a reliable source of income for many families.
Bore Place is home to the Commonwork Trust, a charity founded over 40 years ago with Christian values at its core. Those founding values continue to guide the trust's work today to empower and inspire children and young people. Thanks to your support, Bore Place can work with children and young people of all ages and abilities to reach their full potential. They explore complex global issues such as injustice, poverty and sustainability, and how each person can make a difference in our interconnected and interdependent world.

The team at Bore Place's organic dairy farm in Edenbridge, Kent, work with a wide range of children and young people in a variety of ways including:

- therapeutic and work-related learning for young people with additional needs, disabilities, and personal and mental health issues.
- outdoor learning programmes for schools
- holiday activities for young people with additional needs and disabilities
- events and activities for all ages

The outdoor learning is designed and delivered to achieve interconnected benefits including creating future environmental custodians, life and social skills, and resilience and wellbeing.

The experiential way Bore Place runs its programmes not only inspires learning by doing through being part of our working environment and the natural world, but also enables young people to step outside their comfort zones and build vital soft skills. In developing skills such as problem solving, communication, leadership, and teamwork, children and young people are improving resilience and self-esteem, and ultimately their emotional health and well-being. For our older young people, further outcomes include breaking down barriers to their education and employment. Utilising the whole of the 500-acre site, Bore Place connects young people with food, farm, forest, and nature, and works to inspire them to become future guardians of our planet.

Our hands-on, work-related, and therapeutic sessions are offered to vulnerable young people with personal and mental health issues. The aim is to give them a real opportunity to engage in education and develop skills so they can transition more confidently to the next stage of their lives. The team's work supporting young people with disabilities and learning difficulties continues to grow, offering weekend and holiday clubs for those with additional needs, and regular visits from SEND schools. Bore Place’s specialist teams help children and young people develop important life skills, confidence, and self-esteem in fun and engaging ways. Each year Bore Place also supports 10 families with a child with a disability by providing the opportunity for the whole family to visit and stay on the farm. During their stay, these families take part in a variety of fun and engaging activities, providing respite for each member.