

Poverty and Hope Appeal

July 2018 update from Zimbabwe



Challenging the stigma of HIV in Zimbabwe

ARDeZ (Anglican Relief & Development in Zimbabwe) partnered with USPG, supported by Poverty and Hope since 2018.

Nearly 1.2 million adults in Zimbabwe are living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2011), yet few people feel comfortable talking about it. The stigma surrounding HIV means lives are being lost because people are reluctant to ask questions or come forward for testing and treatment.

HIV also creates poverty. As lives are lost, households lose income. Sometimes children are sent out to work to make ends meet, but they miss out on school and the chance of an education and better-paid employment in the future. And so the cycle of poverty continues.

However, in Rochester's companion Diocese Harare and across Zimbabwe, a new initiative is helping to tackle stigma. USPG (the Anglican Mission Agency) and the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe are working with secular organisations – such as UNAIDS and ZNNP+ (Zimbabwe National Network of People Living with HIV) – to roll out a research programme that is uncovering what life is like for people with HIV so policy-makers are better informed to develop national HIV strategies.

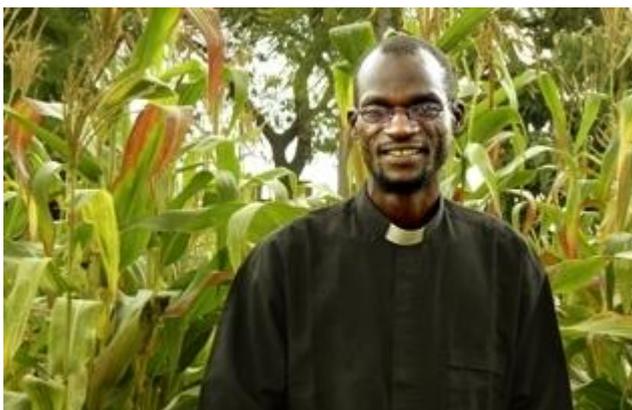
HIV stigma affects all sectors of society

To date, the research has shown that people with HIV face stigma in all sectors of Zimbabwean society, including the church, where only 26 per cent of people with HIV felt comfortable enough to share their HIV status with their church leader. The survey found that thousands of children are being expelled or suspended from school because their parents are HIV-positive. Young people (aged 15 to 19) were found to be particularly sensitive to stigma. Only 3 per cent of those approached were willing to take part in the survey.

Mucha Mukamuri, Executive Director of ZNNP+, said: 'Stigma remains a major barrier for people living with HIV in Zimbabwe. We have been able to share with politicians empirical evidence of the stigma, and this is galvanising a political will to tackle the problem.' The findings are being used as a part of an awareness-raising campaign to try and tackle stigma. This include meetings at Anglican, Methodist and other churches. Mucha said: '*We want to enable understanding among faith communities. We want churches to create an environment in which people can openly disclose their status.*'

It is hoped the research will be used to help break down HIV stigma in the church, helping people to talk more openly about God's care for people with HIV.

Struggling to overcoming HIV stigma: Maxwell's story



The Revd Maxwell Kapachawo is one of a number of people and agencies (including UNAIDS) that are working with USPG to tackle HIV-related stigma in Zimbabwe. Maxwell (pictured) is well-qualified to tackle the subject. He put his vocation and livelihood at risk by taking the brave step of declaring publicly that he is HIV-positive. On two occasions, he was asked to leave by the churches he was overseeing.

But he has now found a church that has accepted him, and the congregation has started talking about what they can do to improve care for people with HIV.

Maxwell explained: 'I felt I had to speak out. The church must not shy away from HIV. It needs to be a place of healing and care. The church is at the heart of communities and, when we get it right, we can have a massive impact.'

He added: 'Everyone in Zimbabwe has family or friends who are no longer here because of HIV. There are many orphans. So we cannot keep running away from HIV. We must work together and, as a result, I hope people will learn about HIV and lives will be saved.'

Mary's Story (Mary's name has been changed)

Mary says "There are two possibilities on how I contracted the virus. It was either at home sexually or at work when working with an AIDS patient as I was a nurse. I still remember in November 1989 there was an AIDS patient who was in a bath tub and the bath tub was almost full of water. I just deep my hand to open a stopper so that water would drain from the tub. Since I did not have protective clothing and the signs that followed hardly three months later I still suspect that could have had been my source of infection.

In February 1990 I started showing signs and symptoms of seroconversion. So maybe that fluid contact from the AIDS patient or the sexual routine at home could be my infection source.

In my life I had managed to have two children but unfortunately one succumbed to a road accident. So I had to live with my one daughter and my husband. When I went for HIV test and tested positive my husband could not take it. He actually went round to almost all the people we knew informing them. It was very stressful period. My husband later on went for HIV test and tested negative. He also went around showing his negative result. The funny thing about it is that he showed all the other people his result slip but could not show the results to me.

My daughter was however very supportive and did not even show fear and I think it was due to adequate information she had on the virus. One of my friends was very supportive to me and she gave me confidence. She actually asked to choose death or life and I chose life. I had to choose life for the sake of my only daughter as I noted she was not going to have anyone to lean to after so much pressure especially from the loose of her brother.

The stigma reduction project have continued to assist me to maintain my self-esteem. The stigma project have established a gathering site at the Harbern park plot where various groups of people come and interact. I do enjoy sharing on nutrition a lot and the herbal nutrition section at the plot is my favourite section.

We have gone further to form a WhatsApp platform where we always share ideas. It is actually a learning and sharing platform. I am one of the project contact persons and I enjoy sharing and uplifting others very much. I have noted there are a lot of people who want psychosocial support and the time we spent it the project site is memorable.

I do have a vision of establishing a health shop at home to ensure that what had sustained me since 1990 also sustains others. I would like to thank the church for coming up with such an exciting programme".

Prayer Points:

- Give thanks that USPG's partner The Anglican Church in Zimbabwe are enabling people to find hope after facing rejection due to their HIV-positive status.
- Pray for openness and sensitivity in all churches so that those with HIV might feel welcome and accepted in God's eyes.
- Pray for Zimbabwe's public healthcare system, which is under enormous strain due to a lack of resources.
- Pray for political leaders in Zimbabwe, following their recent general election, that they may seek peace, equality and justice.



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