

ACT ALLIANCE JOINT ECUMENICAL ACTION RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



COLLECTIVE AND CREATIVE NON-DENOMINATIONAL EFFORTS ARE NEEDED TO OVERCOME GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ZAMBIA. WE HAVE FORMED A FORMIDABLE AND DETERMINED FRONT THAT PROMISES TO STEM THE TIDE OF GBV

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the ACT Alliance Zambia Forum (Zambia Forum) joined faith organizations from seven Southern African countries to dialogue on religion and sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence, and teenage pregnancies. These organizations co-created three interfaith briefs to serve as discussion papers in their communities.

ACT Alliance is the largest coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organizations engaged in humanitarian, development, and advocacy work in the world, consisting of more than 130 members working together in over 120 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race or nationality, in keeping

with the highest international codes and standards. Within those countries, ACT Alliance operates through Forums. Forums are shared platforms or spaces comprising ACT members and observers who are in a particular country, sub-region or region.

Act Alliance Zambia Forum is the Zambia country chapter that is convened by the United Church of Zambia, with DanChurchAid (DCA), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), Christian Aid (CA), World Renew, Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Salvation Army, Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF) as members and with Caritas Zambia, Reformed Church in Zambia – Diaconal Department and Tearfund as observers.

The Zambia Forum is a broad-based ecumenical group that prioritises the promotion of gender justice. It seeks to mobilise its members to be actively involved in the struggle for gender justice in Zambia and beyond. The Forum recognises that there are various historical, political, cultural, religious, economic and other factors that prevent women from enjoying their full rights. It engages in advocacy to promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and has been at the forefront in addressing gender-based violence (GBV).

Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS) 2007 data indicates that almost half (47%) of all Zambian women have experienced physical violence since age 15 (77% by their current/former husband/partner; 7% by a brother or sister; and 6% by their father/stepfather); and one in five (20%) Zambian women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime (64% of which is perpetrated by a current/former husband/partner or boyfriend). Among girls younger than age 15 who were surveyed, the sexual violence/abuse was inflicted by a relative in 19% of cases; 6% by a family friend; and 10% by the girl's friend. Almost half (47%) of the girls who experienced physical or sexual abuse did not seek help – and of these, 6% never told anyone about it. Teenage pregnancy, which may often be an outcome of sexual violence, is alarmingly high in Zambia – with three in ten (30%) of the girls surveyed as part of the 2007 ZDHS (ages 15-19) found to be pregnant or already raising children.

CHANGING MIND-SETS CHANGING LIVES

Arising from patriarchy, gender inequality and oppressive religious and cultural norms, GBV affects people from all sectors of society. Unfortunately, in Zambia faith actors have often minimised or ignored the reality of GBV. The Zambia's Forum is challenging this trend. As part of the Zambia forum's response to GBV, they have engaged in multi-sectoral Gender Based Violence Responses. The intervention is aimed at increasing the utilization of domestic violence prevention and protection services by women, men, and children by both the laity and the ordained in four selected districts of Zambia. The intention is to attain improved protection status of women/girls as well as to encourage supportive attitudes from all community members for the prevention and management of domestic violence. The strategies included systems strengthening, skills building and development and service delivery with a particular focus on the ecumenical partners and their collaboration with other sectors. In addition, it seeks to encourage all members of society to play their part in responding to the challenge of GBV in their communities.

FAITH LEADERS IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE RESPONSE TO GBV

As part of the interventions, from 8-12 December 2019, the Zambia Forum held a workshop in Kabwe Town to encourage faith communities in Zambia to be on the frontline of the response to GBV. These efforts were applauded for being responsive to the realities in the communities and relevant for the faith community. The faith leaders acknowledged their roles in the community because they know the culture of the community and are aware of possible sensitive issues, and thus they can package GBV messages in ways that are consistent with community values.

FROM FAITH TO STRATEGY TO ACTION



WITHOUT A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO GBV, PROGRESS IS DIFFICULT

BISHOP SYDNEY SICHILIMA, UNITED CHURCH OF ZAMBIA

After the trainings, the Zambia Forum adopted several strategies to promote the programme of action against GBV within the church. One strategy has been to encourage the emergence of 'gender champions' within faith communities. These are men and women who have dedicated themselves to the task of breaking down gender barriers and to promoting peaceful societies where GBV does not threaten the health and well-being of women and others.

Another strategy has been through the holding of community dialogues. These are safe spaces where issues of GBV are addressed openly, thereby removing the veil of secrecy that surrounds them.

Further, through systems strengthening, the Zambia Forum has drawn attention to the need to strengthen health, police and legal institutions as well as non-denominational partners, and support closer collaboration amongst them. This was accompanied by skills development and capacity building, which included comprehensive training of service providers such as health workers, lawyers, non-denominational partners, police, teachers, community leaders and others. This has helped to build and strengthen a multi-sectoral response to GBV for survivors at community level. Each Forum member sets aside a budget, enabling them to provide effective and speedy responses to cases of GBV. This is a direct outcome of advocacy efforts that followed the initial workshops.

Through capacity building of paralegal committees, training of police officers in gender-sensitive policing and GBV, equipping district level civil society actors with GBV information and developing and disseminating IEC materials, the Zambia Forum has made significant inroads. Activities have included awareness raising, capacity building trainings, strategic engagements with key stakeholders, provision of therapeutic GBV services and socio-economic empowerment interventions. Mobilising men has been particularly effective as it targets perpetrators of GBV. This focus on men has emerged as a distinctive aspect of the work of the Zambia Forum in its efforts to bring fresh approaches to GBV in the faith community.

The results achieved are very encouraging. For example, the availability of comprehensive GBV services has increased. Furthermore, awareness and knowledge amongst women and girls, and their families (including men and boys), on the availability of comprehensive GBV services also increased. Anecdotal evidence from community-based counsellors confirms these developments. This is noteworthy as issues relating to GBV have □ due to socialisation and oppressive cultural norms □ largely remained off the radar for families and communities. The Advocacy Briefs thus provide a platform which has enabled more open discussion on GBV within faith communities in Zambia.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION

The investment by the Zambia Forum has generated additional benefits which include domesticated gender policies and practical tools to address GBV, developed by the Forum members themselves. As a way of engaging with the private sector, the Forum provides referral information and awareness-raising materials on GBV to companies for their staff. This is a noteworthy development as the private sector has often been left out of efforts to address GBV. Clergy and laity are also more engaged in advocacy campaigns that highlight the costs to society of GBV.

There have nonetheless been some challenges. For example, the absence of comprehensive gender policies among member organizations has made progress on ending GBV difficult. In addition, not all members consider gender a cross-cutting issue. However, these challenges have not prevented the Alliance from registering impressive results following the use of the Interfaith Advocacy Briefs, such as those outlined above. It is envisaged

that the post COVID-19 situation will require all members to redouble their efforts to overcome the worrying and sharp spike in GBV cases during the pandemic. By adopting gender policies, providing safe spaces for survivors of GBV, and by strengthening collaboration, the Alliance can usher in a new and productive era of SRHR services within the faith community and beyond.

ACT Alliance Zambia participated in a series of interfaith dialogues on women's rights and gender equality facilitated by Faith to Action Network and ACT Ubumbano. On that occasion, 12 faith organizations from seven countries in Southern African declared, "We can no longer be silent as we are called to uphold human dignity for all creation." Coming from Bahai, Christian, Muslim and Traditionalist faiths, they developed three

Interfaith briefs on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and teenage pregnancy. They also identified opportunities for engaging more effectively within their faith communities. Faith to Action Network and ACT Ubumbano supported their action plans through micro-grants and technical assistance, contributing to the inspiring results documented in this case study.

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