

BUILDING A FAITH-BASED RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS IN THE CARIBBEAN

A Project undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada
Provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) ESAC Programme
Implemented by the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC)

GUIDELINES FOR CARIBBEAN FAITH – BASED ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPING POLICIES AND ACTION PLANS TO DEAL WITH HIV/AIDS

ACTION PLAN

Introduction

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) represent a major resource in the effort to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. FBOs are being called upon (directly and indirectly), by the wider society to help to address the multi-faceted issues confronting the society in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It would be ideal if these organizations could collaborate in order to address these issues by mutual exchanges of resources, learning and experience. As we work together, we must ask and answer many questions seriously and urgently.

The leadership of FBOs should thus take the lead on the issue of HIV/AIDS and be open to training. The following are some guidelines for consideration:-

Leadership

- Identify and access specialized training to meet new demands including internal expertise and skills to share with the membership.
- Educate current and new leadership in the FBOs as a whole, in their sub-groups and communities
- Prepare women's groups, men's groups, volunteers, youth and children to lead in the struggle.
- Recognize and address the issues of gender and power relations especially as they pertain to sexual relations.

Prevention

- Speak messages of abstinence, chastity, and fidelity in marriage, clarifying what each means in practice.
- Promote responsible sexual behaviour within FBOs and in the general population.
- Promote and support voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) for persons at opportune moments.

- Establish opportunities for sharing information with and among membership on the issues of stigma and discrimination and how this fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Encourage reinforcement of safe behaviour and behaviour change, where necessary, at individual and community level.

Care, Support and Counselling

- Emphasise listening, reconciliation, forgiveness
- Visit the sick and provide support for community and home based care.
- Address substance abuse and the role it plays in the spread of HIV/AIDS and develop relevant responses in terms of care, rehabilitation and prevention.
- Provide basic and advanced training for counsellors
- Pay particular attention to the conditions of orphans and survivors of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and seek ways to build a supportive environment.
- Encourage the development and observance of strict codes of confidentiality for those affected by disclosure whether affected or infected by HIV/AIDS.
- Provide bereavement counselling.
- Give referral to specialized agencies.
- Encourage and actively facilitate adherence to medical recommendations, including adherence to antiretroviral treatment.

Human Rights and Advocacy

- Take a lead role in the discussion in society at large, on ethical issues posed by HIV/AIDS.
- Support members, who face difficult ethical choices in the areas of prevention and care.
- Outline, study and promote the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS through mechanisms at national, regional and international levels.
- Help safeguard the rights of persons affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Agitate for work place policies which do not discriminate negatively against people affected and infected by HIV/AIDS.
- Lobby for the implementation of laws which protect those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Advocate for justice, removal of stigma and discrimination, through FBOs action and examples.

- Advocate for access to medical care and treatment.
- Advocate for increased spending by Governments and medical facilities to find solutions to the problems – both medical and social, raised by the pandemic.
- Recognise the linkage between AIDS and poverty, and advocate measures to promote just and sustainable development.
- Condemn discrimination and stigmatization of PLWHAs.
- Involve PLWHAs in management of the organisation and the development of programmes.
- Care for PLWHAs

Death and Burial

- Observe the right of PLWHAS to dignified final rites.

Education

- Promote the sharing of accurate information about HIV/AIDS, to facilitate an environment of open discussion and work against the spread of misinformation and fear especially within the family.
- Pay particular attention to the issues of human sexuality, power and gender relations, with the goal of character building.
- Establish and utilise curricula in denominational schools, utilising age-appropriate content.
- Establish and utilise curricula in training at theological institutions.
- Educate all members especially involving youth, men and PLWHA in activities aimed at preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Seek to understand more fully the gift of human sexuality in the contexts of personal responsibility, relationships, family life and faith.
- Equip a new generation of religious leaders to engage the FBO on issues related to HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

Gender

- Pay attention to the impact of gender relations (sexual and interpersonal power relations), on women and their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and act accordingly.
- Create special opportunities to educate men to change their behaviour and take responsibility for containing the spread of HIV.

- Address and respond to the challenges of changing gender relations.

Bibliography

2003. “An Active Role for Development and Peace in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS – Policy Statement.”

2003. Kelly, Michael J. in cooperation with Bain, Brendan. Education and HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. UNESCO Office for the Caribbean International Institute for Educational Planning.

2002. Morrison, Ken and Patterson, David. Action Plan on Law Ethics and Human Rights, to implement priority area 1 of Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS 2002-2006 in the areas of law, ethics and human rights.

2002. “HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, prepared by the International Council of AIDS Service Organization.”

2002. “Protocol for the identification of discrimination against people living with HIV.” UNAIDS Best Practice Collection, UNAIDS Geneva, Switzerland.

2001. Greene, Edward C. The Impact of Religious Organisations in Aids Prevention.

2001. “Our Vision, Our Hope: The First Step – All Africa Anglican AIDS Planning Framework, Johannesburg.”

2000-2001. (Abstract) Brathwaite, Brader. “Inspiring a faith-based initiative on AIDS prevention in Trinidad and Tobago.”

2000. The Caribbean Regional Strategic Plan of Action for HIV/AIDS, Caribbean Task Force on HIV/AIDS.

1999. Handbook for Legislators on HIV/AIDS. Law and Human Rights: Action to combat HIV/AIDS in view of its devastating human, economic and social impact UNAIDS/IPU Geneva Switzerland.

1997. “Facing AIDS The Challenge, the Churches’ Response, A WCC Study Document.”

John, T Jacob. Sexuality, Sin and Disease, Theological and Ethical Issues Posed by Aids to the Churches: Reflection by a Physician.

“Partnership & Action for Progress Against HIV/AIDS, CAREC Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of the HIV/Aids Epidemic in the Caribbean: 2001-2005.”

Websites

HIV and AIDS in India: <http://www.avert.org/aidsindia.htm>

UNAIDS website: http://www.unaids.org/fact_sheets/files/Caribbean_Eng.htm

Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA): <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/ehaia-e.html>

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance: <http://www.e-alliance.ch>

Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+): <http://www.gnpplus.net>

UNAIDS: <http://www.unaids.org>

CAREC Website: www.carec.org

November, 2004