

CHANNELS OF HOPE FOR GENDER: UGANDA CASE STUDY

Background

Physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence, as well as harmful traditional practices, continue to be prevalent in Uganda. These have led to diminished gender equity and equality across the education, health, economic and political development sectors. According to the 2011 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey, 56 per cent of women will experience physical violence in their lifetime, 28 per cent sexual, 43 per cent emotional, while 46 per cent of girls are married by age 18. Polygamy, dowry, child labour and child sacrifice further complicate this issue.

World Vision Uganda implemented Reclaiming the Wonders of Sexuality¹ (RWOs) beginning in 2008 to address these issues; in 2011 this evolved into Channels of Hope for Gender (CoH4G), which aims to build sustained relationships through a biblical framework and tools to explore and transform gender relations in families and communities. CoH4G is currently being piloted in two area development programmes (ADPs) in Uganda and aims to reach approximately 300 families and 1200 boys and girls through close to 200 catalysed faith leaders. Results from the pilot will inform the scale-up process.



*Faith leaders in Ngogwe ADP, Buikwe, discuss the CoH4G approach and establish an interdenominational community-based organisation for gender equity
Sophie Aloikin/World Vision Uganda*

Purpose

This case study captures changes that occurred as a result of implementing CoH4G. It also highlights successes and draws attention to challenges to ensure progress towards the outcomes and goals of CoH4G. The following key outputs directly contributed:

- Engaged CoH4G subject matter experts and implementers through interviews and focus groups
- Investigated knowledge, attitude and practice changes in staff and faith leaders
- Documented key success factors and emerging better practices.

Methods

A comprehensive desk review gathered background data of relevant Channels of Hope (CoH) and gender literature for the Ugandan context. In August 2014, research gathered qualitative data through key informant interviews with CoH and gender subject matter experts and implementers from the national office (NO), two ADPs where RWOs was implemented and another two ADPs where CoH4G was being piloted. Research also included nine key informants interviews (KIIs) engaging the national director, integrated programmes director, gender specialist, staff spiritual nurture coordinator, ADP programme managers and

¹ The curriculum of Channels of Hope for Gender was initially adapted from Elaine Pountney's book entitled *Reclaiming the Wonder of Sexuality – a Biblical Understanding of Male and Female*.

community development facilitators. Seven focus group discussions (FGDs) with CoH4G facilitators and faith leaders participating in catalysing workshops further contributed to the research. The process used FGD and KII guides, contextualised to the key informant's role. These guides were based on tools from an ongoing qualitative external evaluation of CoH in eight ADPs in South Africa, Malawi, Kenya and Tanzania. Informants' participation was voluntary and with consent; responses were confidential. All KIIs and FGDs were facilitated in English with simultaneous interpretation into the local language; audio recordings, photographs and verbatim transcripts were recorded. The research analysed all background literature and qualitative data for key themes; it highlights exemplary quotes and draws conclusions.

Better practices

Channels of Hope methodology

Methodologically, CoH profoundly and promptly changes the knowledge, attitude and behaviour of faith leaders and communities, which has the potential to inspire significant ripple effects in the community and the culture at large. The approach engages faith leaders who are respected opinion, culture and change agents, establishes a safe space for personal reflection and the vulnerable state of attitude change, and facilitates participatory and exploratory learning. Many faith leaders and their theology are the products of tradition, rote memorisation. For these faith leaders, CoH is one of the first learning environments that explores challenging questions, provides alternative biblical interpretations and requires critical thinking and prioritising of values. The structured methodology also provides an organised and practical roadmap for action, as well as the information, skills and tools to advance towards gender equity. Notably, the approach invests significant time, energy and resources in building the capacity of local trainers and facilitators. CoH also inspires personal and community planning for local-level advocacy and development work. Finally, the faith communities that comprise the bedrock of local community and culture quite literally become sustainable channels of hope.

Implementing Channels of Hope

In Uganda, implementing the CoH4G pilot project has been a smooth and exemplary process. This success can be attributed to strong and supportive senior leadership, open and honest communication and a vision for improved partnership with the faith communities. Leading by example is key, as the national director explained, 'I have never hidden that I am an advocate for gender relations, and I think I live by that as well.' Senior leadership also provided freedom from the fear of failure, granting staff the opportunity to learn from experience. Diligently and earnestly communicating with staff became a better practice. The national director is well known for continually asking 'What are you missing out on, if you are not focusing on gender?' Senior leadership, Christian commitment and gender and development teams are also very keen to strengthen ties with faith communities as a vital and default way of business in all programmes, CoH4G or otherwise.

Culture change

'Channels of Hope is an opportunity to love as God loves,' explained one community development facilitator. When faith leaders are open and responsive to this opportunity, better practices emerge, which contribute to a culture shift towards improving child well-being. Once equipped with improved knowledge and having nurtured positive and protective attitudes during catalysing workshops, faith leaders lead by

example; in their own relationships, families and homes they actively promote hope. At this point, they can leverage any and every encounter and engagement as a platform to promote gender equity, whether it is a formalised platform to preach or an informal conversation at a trading centre. Consummate change agents often develop or leverage routine opportunities to affirm gender equality; this may manifest as weekly collections for girl orphans, monthly family group gatherings or quarterly interdenominational meetings. ‘I visit church members to monitor the changes and analyse the impact of the teachings,’ said one catalysed faith leader. Further better practices include establishing and nurturing a culture of inclusion where faith leaders invite women, youth and children to actively participate and lead in worship, teaching and other activities. Some of the most active and engaged faith communities have developed community-based organisations (CBOs) to partner between denominations, with government and other development partners to create a ‘big voice for big change’ as expressed by one faith leader.

Successes

Personal and household

CoH4G and the better practices that characterise the implementation of the approach resulted in notable successes emerging in Uganda, even during the pilot phase. Catalysed faith leaders leave the CoH workshop with expanded knowledge as well as positive and protective attitudes towards gender equity. ‘Channels of Hope inspires a positive attitude; those who have come [participated], have changed,’ mentioned one community development facilitator. Once these personal changes fully mature and blossom, faith leaders feel compelled to act accordingly in their own homes among their own families. One senior faith leader explained ‘I just couldn’t sit idly by as my wife worked’ and another remarked ‘we need to break the silence and stand for justice’. Breaking the silence and standing for justice in their own lives led faith leaders to communicate openly and honestly in their homes; building trust, faith and love. Beyond communication, faith leaders also reported sharing decision-making, responsibilities and meals with the entire family; husbands, wives and children all actively participating as equals. In this way, faith leaders recognised that they ‘... are actually fulfilling our duties as pastors’.

‘Like a seed planted in the ground, the sower must believe that it will germinate and produce new life, so too will peoples’ hearts, minds, and attitudes slowly but surely change through Channels of Hope.’

Senior Pastor
Full Gospel Church
Nakasongola, Uganda

Congregational

‘Channels of Hope helped us to restore up [transform] without discrimination and fear,’ reported a senior faith leader. Once personal and household transformation takes place, it further inspires faith leaders to act; one faith leader proclaimed, ‘we, the church, have lots to do now!’ Most often and naturally, this stage of activism inspires the larger faith community. Faith leaders report advocating for gender equity in their congregations on issues of gender-based violence (GBV), HIV and AIDS, polygamy, child marriage and sexual abuse. This advocacy and activism often manifests as preaching gender equity and developing Congregational Hope Action Teams (CHATs), which in turn results in a myriad of successes. Notably, faith leaders testified to CHATs that work daily to spread hope, females who take on leadership roles, seminars that focus on gender equity and congregants who seek counselling and advice on gender equity. These individual successes continuously grow and expand to establish a congregational cultural movement. This has, in certain instances, reportedly inspired salvation and grown the church.

Community

At times the successes evident in homes and congregations are magnified in the wider community, most notably when catalysed faith leaders establish and encourage child protection committees and interdenominational CBOs that focus on gender equity. Specific successes include: teaching children their rights to attend and participate in school and faith communities; establishing income-generating activities to support orphans and vulnerable children with scholastic materials and opportunities to engage in education; and sensitising communities via the work of drama groups. CoH messages reportedly permeated even beyond the boundaries of the ADPs where CoH is implemented. Most impressively, faith leaders also reported increased HIV and AIDS counselling and testing and reduced cases of child neglect, domestic violence and child sacrifice.

World Vision Uganda

'In Uganda, we look at gender as a foundation for achieving child well-being,' remarked the national director. This mindset among senior leaders and subject matter experts permeates throughout the rest of the NO. Implementing CoH4G was a great success; it furthered the inclusion of gender equity programming and church engagement. It also strengthened communication and collaboration among key internal stakeholders. Programmatically, the detailed baseline assessment was successful and will provide a rigorous benchmark to evaluate the CoH4G pilot project, which continues to progress in line with its implementation plan.

Challenges

Culture

Despite the many successes detailed above, significant challenges continue to persist in Ugandan culture. The gender specialist explained, 'Gender-based violence is everywhere and strong; there is no community where you will not find GBV.' Christians and educated persons are among the perpetrators. A culture of silence persists among GBV survivors as one generation teaches the next when people are unable or unwilling to change gender norms. As one faith leader put it, 'That is what culture has taught us.' Men often do not engage and are ill-informed, despite being the traditional decision makers. Men also perceive gender equity to deny them their rightful authority. Faith communities often misinterpret scripture relating to gender relations either due to a lack of theological training or the infiltration of secular culture and norms. Faith leaders are at times also afraid to challenge the pervasive culture due to the perception that they would lose their authority. All these notions have and continue to challenge gender equality in the Ugandan context.

Implementation

From a programme implementation perspective, different challenges threaten to limit the success of CoH. Development sectors often work in isolation with little integration on cross-cutting issues like gender relations. While the CoH methodology focuses on training of facilitators, some critics pointed to too much emphasis on training and not enough on community implementation; others mentioned limited resources and guidance on how to help faith leaders transform theoretical sensitisations into practical action. As is often the case in rural settings, distance and lack of time or financial resources limit faith leaders' ability to attend workshops. Faith leaders also acknowledged a need to build capacity to monitor and evaluate, and to acquire and manage grants and resources (from transport to communication and technology) to facilitate

trainings in their own congregations. Resources provided are most often, if not exclusively, produced in English. Although English is the national language of Uganda, many in faith communities communicate most effectively in their local language. In certain localities, informants highlighted interdenominational misunderstandings as significant barriers to implementing CoH. Faith leaders also reported that their congregations are at times too engaged in other activities to meaningfully participate in CoH. The NO has historically viewed CoH4G as a project and has yet to fully integrate the methodology into policy, protocol and procedures.

Lessons learnt

The CoH methodology has empowered faith leaders throughout Uganda with improved knowledge. One of the key lessons learnt through this powerful behaviour change approach is the notion that culture is learnt, adapted and ever-changing, while God and his Word are never-changing. This has profound implications for the inherent tension often felt between religious truths and learned culture. Faith leaders were quick to share the lesson that silence actively contributes to injustice and that the church can and should change this culture of silence. They also frequently learnt that Jesus turns every earthly system upside down. He is the ultimate servant leader whom we should follow in thought, word and deed with emphasis on the biblical messages of love, unity, forgiveness and service. Finally, CoH4G continually inspired the idea that promoting gender equity is everyone's responsibility and benefits everyone, not simply women and girls. The gender specialist expressed this notion and noted, 'Gender is not about feminism or woman empowerment, but it is actually something that everyone needs to address.'

From a wider programme perspective, subject matter experts and CoH implementers continually shared three key lessons. Firstly, personal transformation is a prerequisite for wider cultural and community change. Faith leaders and educators can still be educated; their changed hearts can change hearts and having been inspired they can inspire to bring hope to the hopeless. However, it all depends on a profound personal attitude and behaviour change of the faith leader. Secondly, the church is a key development player. CoH4G highlights how the faith community is a powerful platform and how it is a vital voice for the voiceless victims of violence and a helping hand to the helpless. Thirdly, CoH programming highlights the essential nature of partnerships within and amongst denominations, and with the local-level government. Real results only materialise where synergistic partnerships are a priority.

Why Channels of Hope works

Considering both the better practices, which result in significant successes and the challenges that facilitate learnings, all stakeholders continue to see CoH as a powerful approach to engage faith communities in affirming gender equality. The overall reasons why CoH works are many and diverse; however, the most powerful and prevalent include the following. CoH recognises the church as a powerful development partner and platform to promote social justice; it utilises an empowering and exploratory process to promote interdenominational reflection and partnership; and respectfully challenges conventional culture with Christ. 'CoH looks at some of the myths that have been perpetrated over generations,' reflected the gender specialist. CoH uniquely engages the belief system to inspire head, heart and hand transformation; this begins as a personal transformation of the faith leader and later proliferates through faith communities. A CoH team member remarked, 'How can you advocate for something you don't believe in or do?' Finally, CoH

inspires bold, courageous faith in action, in terms of advocacy and activism for gender equality. As the integrated programme director summarised, ‘The church’s calling is to help the communities, to bring them to the truth, reconciliation, love, peace and hope, and those are the messages we are trying to promote in the communities.’

Recommendations

World Vision believes that for CoH4G to more fully engage and empower faith leaders and communities to affirm gender equality, NOs, ADPs and all stakeholders that implement CoH need to realise the following:

National office

- Ensure senior leadership and staff understand, buy-in and advocate for gender equity
- Standardise indicators for inclusion in compendium, strategy, detailed implementation plans, etc.
- Implement CoH4G pilot project, review outcomes and impact, make recommendations
- Develop and disseminate a business case for CoH4G scale-up
- Promote CoH4G as an holistic approach, not a singular project
- Integrate CoH4G into NO strategy, policies, protocols and procedures as a cross-cutting approach
 - Deliver an official support statement from the leadership.

Area development programme

- Build capacity of faith leaders to monitor and evaluate, acquire and manage grants
 - Bridge gaps to collect data, report and communicate
- Emphasise the ‘strategise’ and ‘empower’ phases of CoH methodology
 - Provide planning and facilitation resources in the local language
- Share success stories and lessons learnt across ADPs, denominations and faith communities
- Engage other influential community leaders, regardless of faith, with adapted CoH curricula
- Help to establish or re-focus CBOs, parent unions and interdenominational governing bodies.

Conclusion

‘We cannot do development work without bringing in the church and other faith groups,’ remarked the national director. The gender specialist added, ‘Once you address gender issues, you are able to address so many other things because then you have the men and women working together; the children empowered, going to school, participating; the division of labour issue not there; and gender-based violence reduced.’ These comments point towards the unique niche that World Vision fills with CoH4G. If we are to more fully empower the faith community to promote gender equity, we must recognise the challenges, learn from the lessons, and implement the better practices presented to us from Uganda, such that we achieve even greater successes for the well-being of the most vulnerable.



Gilbert Kamanga
National Director
World Vision Uganda