

Connecting Lives



Welcome to Connecting Lives!

In this time of global tension, mistrust and division (despite glimmers of hope), this issue focuses on inclusion.

How do we make sure that no one is left behind? Are laws enough? What else can we do?

While structural measures have their place, Eagles' Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) process tackles discrimination at its roots – the deep-seated beliefs and attitudes underpinning exclusion.

Instead of imposing measures from the outside, Bible studies and participatory activities move hearts and challenge negative mindsets, leading to collective problem-solving and deep, lasting solutions.

No person is less human...

The local church in Govala, Zomba, is challenging stigma faced by people living with HIV. After Eagles' training, they moved into action in 20 villages. Jimmy, Eagles CCM Coordinator explains:

◀ *CCM Bible studies expose the danger of stigma and .. the need to treat every person with love, respect and dignity. No person today is less human. Everyone has the capacity to contribute effectively to society.* ▶

The youth used drama (photo above) to challenge people's attitudes, help them empathise and change behaviours. As a result, people – including leaders as role models – revealed their status; and the community addressed root causes of the spread of HIV, resulting in a reduction of multiple sexual partnerships and adultery.

The church set up four support groups – but ones that included both HIV positive and negative people so they could bridge the divide and address issues with the community together.

And the church called a meeting with government officials to tackle the barriers people felt in going for treatment at the local health centre – solving 90% of their concerns within two months!

(Cont p.3)

From suffering to sufficiency

◀ *Savings groups are the only thing that help people living with HIV /AIDS have confidence to save money, borrow and run small scale businesses that support their families.* ▶▶

Eagles trained all the support groups in Balaka and Zomba, southern Malawi, how to save money together and take out loans to begin or expand businesses. Having a regular source of income is even more vital for people living with HIV, so they can access the nutrition they need to remain healthy and so they can continue to make money even when their health is not good enough for work like farming.



A safe place ...

Eagles invited 40 churches leaders and five chiefs to join their support group training for 22 members of a Balaka HIV support group. They wanted to increase their understanding about the reality of HIV and combat the stigma that people face every day. They created such a safe space that people shared things that would normally be completely unacceptable in Malawi. One of the participating leaders shared for the first time that they too were HIV positive. As the group discussed the importance of treatment, a woman felt comfortable enough to volunteer that she was also seeking help for menstrual problems. And the Traditional Authority (head of all the village chiefs) confessed to her own past failures, and committed to doing better in the future.



◀ *When some of my family members were dying of AIDS, I thought they were bewitched! I will go back and apologise to them and tell them that they are right to go for HIV testing and treatment.* ▶▶

Participants ranked all the strategies to address stigma and formed a prioritised action plan. They elected one of the village chiefs and a church leader to lead them in implementing their decisions.

No person is less human... *(continued from p.1)*

UNICEF research on lasting behaviour change shows us that people must engage with issues on the level of **their hearts** (their emotions and their memories), **their minds** (their knowledge and the facts) and **their faith** (their deepest values and beliefs). They need the space to change their minds and attitudes from deep conviction, not through lectures or persuasion. CCM enables this to happen.

Eagles shows churches and communities how they can tackle stigma by addressing six evils: stigma, shame, denial, discrimination, inaction and mis-action....

and apply four positive approaches:

safer practices; access to treatment; voluntary counselling and testing; and empowerment.



Stigma kills

Shaibu and his wife, Mercy, were diagnosed as HIV positive. Few diagnoses carry so much fear. Everyone in Malawi knows someone who has died from AIDS. But deadlier than the disease itself, is the stigma against it. Stigma prevents people seeking anti-retroviral therapy, which allows people to live long, healthy lives. Bedridden, Mercy and Shaibu were abandoned by everyone. Their community ignored them as they became more and more sick - hunger and poverty eroding their chances of survival.

All this changed when local church members in Govala visited the couple and brought them food and soap. They supported them to access treatment and regain strength and energy. Shaibu and Mercy joined one of the support groups, finding a space of acceptance. They now provide care to others.

◀ *Our lives have been transformed! Now we are able to join village activities. My life has been totally changed because now I feel loved. Had it not been for the church coming to rescue us, I do not know what would have happened to us.* (Shaibu) ▶

Eagles' CCM online leaves no one behind

The CCM online course continues to reach new denominations and organisations, equipping others with the skills to begin CCM in their context. Our most recent cohort discussed how to create safe, inclusive spaces through CCM – and challenge others to do the same. They learned how to facilitate 'Take a Step' – an activity that helps people empathise with those who face stigma and find ways to reach, involve and empower those who are usually left out of development. It happens like this:

- 1) The facilitator assigns different contextually relevant characters to people in the group. Some are extremely vulnerable, such as a teenage girl who has been sexually abused; and some have high status, like the local headteacher or development worker.
- 2) People put themselves in their character's shoes - someone really different to themselves - and imagine what life is like for them. They line up next to each other.
- 3) The facilitator asked 10 yes/no questions, such as 'Does your family have nutritious food to eat all year?' If the character would answer yes, people take a step forward. If no, they stay still.
- 4) After 10 questions, some people have taken 10 step forwards while others are visibly left behind. They share how it feels to be left behind and how it feels to be ahead of everyone.



They discuss: *How easy is it for the characters at the back to join in CCM activities? What can the community do to overcome these barriers?* And they plan how they will move forward together.

Meet Victor

Victor, Eagles' director, is currently visiting the UK and meeting Bath-based supporters, as well as Eagles' donors. Here's a reminder of who he is!

Why did you join Eagles?

I joined Eagles because of my passion for social justice. I care deeply about the poor and under-privileged. That's why I am doing the work I do.

What do you most enjoy about work?

When I see change happening in the poor people we are helping; when we make a real difference in someone's life; when we manage to put a smile back on someone who couldn't afford a smile.



What are the biggest challenges you face?

Pressure of work; ensuring the most important things get done; and lack of resources. I fail many times but I do not give up. I keep learning and trying to improve all the time.

Tell us about your family

I am married to a lovely lady called Charity, who works at Standard Bank. We have four children - Caroline (35), Joshua (29), Wezi (24) and Watipaso (17).