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SUCCESS STORY: KENYA

Clergy Living with HIV/AIDS Unite

USAID supports religious leaders' vision to end HIV/AIDS stigma



World Vision Canada

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April 2005

U.S. Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov

SHORTLY AFTER LOSING HIS WIFE to AIDS in 1992, Ugandan Canon Gideon Byamugisha became the first African clergyman to openly declare his HIV-positive status. Since then, he has sought to eliminate HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination by advocating the **4 Es**—empathy, empowerment, equipment, and engagement; and the **6 Ps**—prayers, policies, plans, programs, personnel, and partnerships. With support from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through USAID, clergy have recently begun to implement Canon Byamugisha's approach in Kenya.

The Kenya Network of Religious Leaders Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS (Kenerela), the first such network in East, Central, and Southern Africa, was established in February 2004 by 44 religious leaders at a retreat in Limuru, Kenya.

Religious leaders wield significant influence in Kenya, where the vast majority of people are members of faith communities. Kenerela's initial statement though claimed, "a deafening silence permeates religious communities with regard to HIV and AIDS." In April 2004, Kenerela members were given technical guidance and financial assistance that enabled them to define their mission and draft a workplan through 2007. Goals include establishing eight regional branches to "network with stakeholders in the fight against HIV/AIDS-related stigma, denial, inaction, and discrimination in our congregations, thus reducing the [HIV] prevalence to 20% within the age group of 15–49 years." The POLICY Project, in collaboration with World Vision, helped bring together 52 religious leaders from five African countries, all of whom are living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. They shared a common vision of a Kenya "... where stigma, denial, and discrimination are nonexistent" and religious leaders "are witnesses of hope and forces of change in their congregations and communities." In August 2004, Kenerela members met with members of faith-based organizations and with people living with HIV/AIDS to discuss ways to network to forward their shared goals.

Kenerela membership now totals 1,000 in eight provinces and includes HIV-positive religious leaders, clergy who have lost or are caring for close relatives, fellow religious leaders, congregants, and friends of the organization. Kenerela encourages congregations to provide home-based care, counseling, and peer education for people living with HIV/AIDS, and for local orphans and vulnerable children. Kenerela also works to increase capacity and interventions for assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Perhaps Kenerela's most important function is to provide accurate information, communication, positive role models, and nonjudgmental support to people living with HIV/AIDS.