



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



SUCCESS STORY

Faith-Based Responses to HIV/AIDS in Africa

USAID helps church denominations to establish policies that improve prevention, care and support, and reduce stigma related to AIDS



Adventist News Network Jr Ferrer

Pastor Geoffrey Mbwana, President of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, spoke out against stigma during his presentation at a regional workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2003.

Pastor Geoffrey Mbwana of the Seventh Day Adventist Church explained the importance of a faith-based response this way: “We have to have no stigmatizing of people with AIDS; let them know that Jesus embraces them with His love.”

April 2005

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

RELIGIOUS LEADERS’ PROMINENCE IN THEIR communities and their ability to stimulate grassroots responses make them critical to mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS. Their leadership is also needed to break the silence and stigma surrounding the disease. With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), faith-based communities in Africa are taking concrete steps to confront the AIDS epidemic.

Recently, Pastor Geoffrey Mbwana, president of the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, explained the importance of a faith-based response this way: “We have to have no stigmatizing of people with AIDS; let them know that Jesus embraces them with His love.”

With USAID support, in November 2003, the POLICY Project helped the ECD Seventh Day Adventist Church in Kenya host a regional workshop for 150 participants from five continents, including 19 people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Discussions at this event laid the groundwork for the denomination’s HIV/AIDS policy and resulted in the Nairobi Declaration, which pledged to design the policy framework for churches in ten countries in the region to establish HIV/AIDS programs. A policy and strategic plan developed and endorsed in 2004 is now being disseminated throughout the ECD regions.

Nigeria’s two largest Christian denominations have also taken action. In July 2003, the project provided technical assistance to the Catholic Church of Nigeria to develop a plan to implement the HIV/AIDS policy adopted in 2002. The five-year plan addresses three objectives: reducing transmission of HIV in Catholic health institutions and parishes in Nigeria, improving the quality of life of people and families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on communities.

Unlike other churches in Nigeria, the 20-million-member Anglican Church has not traditionally addressed health-related needs of its congregation. Following workshops and stakeholder consultations conducted with USAID’s technical assistance, the House of Bishops adopted the Anglican Church HIV/AIDS policy in March 2004 and a five-year plan that provides guidance on issues related to prevention, care and support, and the protection of rights for infected and affected members.

Prior to its work with POLICY, the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) was committed to addressing HIV/AIDS but did not have a coordinated response to the epidemic. In September 2003, its General Assembly adopted a four-pillar HIV/AIDS strategic framework and a vision statement to guide future HIV/AIDS activities across presbyteries in the three countries, and in March 2004 UPCSA appointed a full-time coordinator to head its HIV/AIDS program.