



**BIBLE ENGAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV & AIDS IN AFRICA:
A STRATEGIC CONSULTATION FOR THE FORUM OF BIBLE AGENCIES**

BACKGROUND PAPER NO 2

**HIV&AIDS IN AFRICA:
A REVIEW OF AGENCIES' PROGRAMS**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In preparation for the October 2007 strategic consultation in Nairobi, the Forum of Bible Agencies International has undertaken to assess the HIV & AIDS efforts of their member agencies, as well as selected relief and development organizations, to create both a snapshot overview and preliminary analysis of said initiatives. Our intention is neither to “re-invent the wheel” nor to duplicate exiting initiatives but rather to add value to what already exists, particularly through our growing understanding of “Bible engagement” and of the need to work together more effectively.¹

To this end, in December of 2006 a survey was sent to the FOBA member agencies asking them to detail the scope, intent, and outcomes of their HIV/AIDS ministries.² They were also asked to provide us with insights on lessons they have learned, barriers faced, and how they felt the church might be more effective in dealing with the pandemic. To date, thirteen responses have been received, as well as two from cooperating relief and development agencies.³ Analysis of the resulting compilation of data is the purpose of this paper.

2. OVERVIEW: SCOPE

Of the thirteen responding agencies, three agencies have activity in between 1-10 African countries, four have activity in 10-20 countries, and four have activity in 20+ African countries. The remaining two have no activity in Africa. The African countries with the highest level of member agency activity are Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Mozambique, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Cameroon. In each of those countries there are five or more member agencies active.

¹ HIV/AIDS Consultation Programme Design Brief 21-7-07

² See Appendix 1, “Blank Survey”

³ The responding member agencies are: SIM International, Crossroads, Institute for Bible Translation, American Bible Society, WBT/SIL, Lifewords, UBS Africa, IBS Africa, Scripture Union, Book of Hope, Bible League, The Seed Company, and World Mission and the responding relief and development agencies are World Relief and World Hope.

In financial terms, only SIM and Crossroads exceed \$1 million in their dedicated annual HIV/AIDS budgets. Five of the agencies exceed \$100,000 a year, and two of them have HIV/AIDS budgets in the vicinity of \$50,000 annually. Some agencies were unable to report totals, because their countries work separately and the agency doesn't apply a total budget figure to HIV/AIDS. It should be noted that some of the above figures are based on estimates based on varying types of figures given by the agencies. However, it is safe to say that the majority of responding member agencies spend upwards of \$100,000 a year on HIV/AIDS related ministries.

Member agencies also respond that they have been involved in HIV/AIDS ministries for varying lengths of time. The survey offered them a range to choose from: 0-1 years, 1-5 years, 5-10 years, and 10+ years. The majority of respondents (five) indicated that their ministries have been in existence for 1-5 years. Three responses land in the 0-1 range, and three in the 10+ range. The remaining two have been involved in HIV/AIDS ministry for 5-10 years.

Even assuming that the exact length of time and dollar figures fall at the minimum of the given ranges, this demonstrates a collective forty-five years of HIV/AIDS experience among FOBA member agencies, coupled with roughly \$5 million dollars that is being spent annually.

3. OVERVIEW: PROGRAM CONCEPT

The survey asked member agencies to detail the program concept behind their HIV/AIDS work. The research team also undertook a comprehensive review of agency materials as they were provided to us, to enhance our understanding of the specific programs.⁴

Overwhelmingly, this review and the survey results show that the focus of member agencies' efforts has been in the area of prevention, education, and character building. Many of the curricula deal with understanding what AIDS is and how it is spread, and with making wise choices based on Christian values, self-esteem, and an understanding of risks and consequences. The goal of many of these programs falls under the aegis of

⁴ See Appendix 2, "Materials Overview"

behavior change. Abstinence and faithfulness are stressed as the keys to stemming the spread of the epidemic. To this end, there are some materials that deal with building character among young people in the broader sense, not just related to sexual activity, and with healthy marriages and parenting skills.

A second broad category encompassing many of the agencies' materials and programs could be described as care for the infected/affected. Into this category would go materials dealing with the elimination of stigma, scriptural encouragement for those living with or caring for someone with the disease. There is slightly less emphasis on this second category among the materials; however it is still substantially represented.

Far fewer of the agencies' programs or materials delve into areas that might be called social justice or societal/structural sin. The focus is overwhelmingly on the individual, the choices that individual makes, and the consequences of those choices. One exception to this is the Good Samaritan curriculum provided by UBS Africa. The fictional account of Suzanne, a young woman infected with HIV, gives a thought-provoking portrayal of the lack of choice some individuals, particularly women, can face.

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate which methods they use to ensure that the target audience encounters Scripture. The choices they were given were: Study groups using Bibles, New Testaments or Scripture Portions distributed as part of the program, Study groups using special Scripture Resources developed for HIV/AIDS programs, Study groups using Scripture-based audio visual, drama, story-telling, and other. The first two methods (Scripture portions or special resources) were used by eight member agencies each (not the same eight agencies for each). Only three indicated that they use audio-visual material; drama and story telling were each used by four agencies. Two agencies listed "music" under the distinction of "other."

4. MEASUREMENT

Member agencies were asked to provide for us examples of how they track the effectiveness of their programs, as well as the research methods they use to determine program design and modification. The survey also provided space for respondents to

detail the different ways in which the target audience encounters Scripture or scriptural themes in the midst of their programs.

Responses to the impact indicators question demonstrate progress in the area of monitoring and evaluation, but also room for growth. It is safe to say at this point that much of the assessment that takes place is qualitative in nature, as opposed to quantitative. The quantitative information gathering that does take place includes but is not limited to: number of participating volunteers, number of households visited, number of youth attending classes, number of teachers trained, number of churches participating, number of facilitators trained, how many units of material have been distributed, and number of abstinence pledges collected. While some survey responses listed indicators such as reduced infection rate and increased HIV testing, follow up interviews show that at this time, very few if any member agencies have the capacity to actually measure these broader societal impacts.

Many of the survey responses list things like attitude change and behavior change as impact indicators, while in professional Monitoring and Evaluation terminology, these would be considered goals or outcomes. This is one major area for growth revealed by the surveys: a need for increased education among member agency staff on the finer points of assessment, measurement, and quantitative analysis. Reasons for the lack of this type of analysis vary. Some organizations are too small to conduct any kind of comprehensive evaluation, some lack personnel or funds, some experience tremendous difficulty in receiving information from the field due to lack of communications infrastructure or cultural differences in expectations. Nevertheless, before being able to adequately compare impact across the board between member agencies, reporting and measurement tools would need to be improved to achieve a level of uniformity.

The majority of information that is gathered and used to assess program impact is qualitative in nature. Comment cards, anecdotes, observations, feedback, pastors documenting follow up questions, life stories, and perceived improved relationships are all among the factors that make up this body of qualitative research.

The research and analysis that goes into program design and modification is another area in which improvements could be made. There are varying degrees of advance research preceding agency involvement at the country level, and much like the impact indicator measurement, it is largely qualitative in nature. However, it is also an area in which observable improvements are being made even now.

One member agency (Crossroads – active in Russia as opposed to Africa), is in the midst of conducting a scientific study in conjunction with a local university, faculty assistance from Calvin College in the US, and the Russian ministry of education. Research and analysis efforts at UBS Africa are now being coordinated via a newly established HIV/AIDS desk in Nairobi. WBT/SIL began their current work in the area of HIV/AIDS as an outgrowth of their trauma and healing program, in response to grassroots request from pastors. Ongoing modifications are the result of a cyclical process of feedback involving both the translators and the pastors who are implementing the program at the local level. Lifewords reports working with “high level leaders and theologians” in addition to their local leaders to understand the audience and context for their work. UBS uses the SWOT tool of analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to assess internal and external factors for success. Scripture Union uses SPSS (a statistical analysis software tool) to analyze their baseline surveys, as well as focus groups to gauge context and audience, pre-and-post life skills research to measure program impact, and other country-level research to inform program design. Focus groups were also reportedly a key factor in designing the “iMatter” curriculum from Book of Hope’s subsidiary, Hope Education.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

Finally, the surveys looked at challenges and barriers to encountering Scripture, lessons learned in the context of HIV/AIDS ministry, and how the church as a whole could be more effective in dealing with the pandemic. One member agency, SIM, reports that capacity of local churches is sometimes a challenge to being able to roll projects out faster, and to project management and dealing with outside donors. Lack of funding was a common theme, as was limited personnel. Other barriers/challenges mentioned include: opposition by government, religious, or educational authorities; stigma,

indifference, pastoral roadblocks to open discussion, lack of whole Bible in local language, illiteracy, and reticence of church leaders and some agency volunteers to openly discuss HIV in the context of the Bible and Christianity. Despite all of these challenges, through God's grace, the member agencies persist in their efforts.

So what have they learned from all this? The volume of answers received in response to survey questions asking about organizational transformation, lessons learned from the infected/affected, and church effectiveness, exceeds the space allowed by this brief synopsis. Below is just a sampling of quotes excerpted from the surveys to give the reader an idea of what member agencies are saying, in their own words:

“[There has been]A re-awakening to integral/holistic ministry rather than separating ‘the sacred’ and ‘the secular’...A re-evaluation of partnership...An opening up to creative new structures which enable a multi-country response.” – *SIM*

“That the Great Command is an integral part of the Great Commission.” – *Crossroads*

“It is a far better strategy to use the 40+ Bible Societies in Africa to address the immediate problems of AIDS versus attempting to create program and content initiatives here in the U.S. Our African colleagues have far more credibility with U.S. donors.” – *American Bible Society*

“There is no one answer to the pandemic. The issues of urban migration, poverty and erosion of the family unit are fundamental to the problem and need to be addressed.” – *Lifewords*

“Awareness on HIV and AIDS alone without teaching young people Lifeskills to help them face life challenges is not enough for behavior change.” – *Scripture Union Africa*

“Our experience was that Scripture engagement offered independently of any outreach to meet physical needs was not nearly as effective.” – *World Mission*

6. CONCLUDING ANALYSES

In summary, we have seen how thirteen member agencies responding to the survey from the Forum of Bible Agencies International have a collective 45 years' experience and \$5 million annual budget invested in addressing the pandemic of HIV/AIDS that is gripping the African continent. We have observed that their programs center largely on prevention and education, with a secondary focus on caring for the infected/affected. We have further noted that the majority of the agencies use Scripture portions or specially developed Scriptural resources in their HIV/AIDS programs, while fewer use audio-visual methods, drama, story-telling, or music. And we have discerned that while room for improvement in quantitative monitoring and evaluation exists, agency efforts at qualitative analysis have provided some valuable insights and lessons to contemplate while moving forward.

Consultation participants may want to take up a discussion on several themes emerging from these surveys. For example, are member agencies adequately portraying all that Scripture has to say into this pandemic? Or is the majority emphasis on individual choice and consequences eclipsing Biblical principles of social justice? Are member agencies using culturally appropriate methods of reaching their target audiences with Scriptural messages presented in relevant media forms? How could agency resources and personnel, as well as their experience and expertise, be leveraged to improve collective efforts at effectively monitoring and evaluating program impact? Could research informing program design and modification be improved, and how could member agencies assist one another in improving it?

This paper finds that there is cause for rejoicing as well as room for growth. Further dialogue should take into account the collective resources of member agencies, and how collaboration could serve to multiply efforts and see greater outcomes.

Appendix 1: Blank Survey

Appendix 2: Materials Overview