

CHANNELS OF HOPE for GENDER

What is CoH for Gender?

Channels of Hope (CoH) for Gender is an innovative approach to exploring gender identities, norms and values from a faith perspective. The programme methodology challenges faith leaders to acknowledge and act upon gender injustices in their communities, as these are realities in many places where World Vision works.

When faith leaders promote principles of equality, and the shared access and utilisation of family and community resources, this contributes to harmonious relationships within families, faith groups and communities.

Why CoH for Gender?

Hundreds of thousands of faith leaders overcame their silence and judgement as a result of the CoH HIV and AIDS programme methodology. They have been helping others do the same since.

In that process, it became clear to faith leaders that gender imbalances impact the transmission, treatment and even care for those infected with HIV. As a result, they asked the question, “Now that we know all this, how do we respond to gender issues from our faith perspectives?” CoH for Gender was created to equip faith leaders to develop their own, more informed answers.

While faith leaders are amongst the most influential members in any given community, their interpretation and the resulting application of religious texts can be detrimental to gender relationships. In some instances religious text has been used to validate cultural practices that keep women on the fringes of processes that are critical to their own development and to that of their families and communities.

Some prejudices are occasioned by patriarchal traditions that extend more power and privilege to males at the expense of females. The consequences of such power imbalances range from lack of equitable access and control of family and community resources to gender-based violence, which affects women and girls disproportionately. This ultimately not only impacts the wellbeing of women and girls, but the holistic development of communities.

A typical example is the understanding of “headship”, a classic patriarchal viewpoint that supports a male leadership role with absolute power and subservient roles for women. This can be a profoundly deep root of gender inequality in families and communities. With openness to alternative theological understandings and with access to other sources of information, faith leaders can significantly change their attitudes and be part of multi-sectoral responses that promote healthy gender relationships in communities.



Esteban Quevas with his 2-year-old daughter. Esteban works for World Vision in the Dominican Republic. He is also a father, and his children adore him. “He’s a good father,” says his 15-year-old son Emanuel. “He’s a good husband ... I’ve learned many things [about] how to treat a woman well.”

Photo: Abby Stalsbroten/World Vision

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CoH for Gender programme content

As the CoH for Gender methodology was first introduced in Christian-majority contexts, the sacred text in use is the Bible. However plans are underway to develop a version which will rely on the Koran as the authority for matters of faith and practice in Muslim contexts.

CoH for Gender also integrates information from the gender and development field to strengthen and mainstream relevant responses.

Together these two sets of resources (Scripture and development expertise) are used to address the following gender issues in communities: inequality of men and women, the cultural and theological bases for it; lack of equitable access to resources and the consequences of it; lack of participation in decision-making bodies of churches and communities; and gender-based violence.

Outcomes

- Faith leaders demonstrate a healthy faith perspective on gender and are able to frame faith-based responses relating to gender justice
- Faith, community and young leaders become role models influencing the positive change of attitudes, values and norms regarding gender relationships
- Participation, access and control of resources are improved for both male and female members of communities.

Advocacy

Faith leaders can become active advocates for all the issues covered in the CoH for Gender programme. Doors are also opened to other avenues of advocacy, including fundamental human rights, to strengthen the response to injustices of various forms. Such responses could involve child rights and protection and conflict transformation, just to cite a few possibilities.

Use in other groups

CoH for Gender is currently addressing Christian communities. These same materials also have been used effectively with various non-faith groups including teachers, community leaders and youth. In these cases, the curriculum can be used without the faith-specific content.

“For a society where male dominance is viewed as an acceptable aspect of their cultures, most men feel that it is their responsibility to discipline their wives even to the extent of beating them up. I have seen marriages and families restored as a result of Channels of Hope for Gender. I consider Channels of Hope for Gender as part of my ministry.”

Jack Maiga, Senior Pastor
Burns Creek Adventist Church,
Honiara, Solomon Islands