

Faith in development

A Case study from World Vision Zimbabwe

World Vision has improved the wellbeing of children and their families in Zimbabwe through tackling underlying belief systems which were contributing to poor maternal health, high mortality rates and limited education, especially for girls. Staff have been able to build vital relationships with highly influential faith leaders, most notably those from the Apostolic Church, through seeking common ground. As a result, incidences of child marriage have reduced, more girls are attending school and a greater acceptance and use of health facilities has emerged. As a Christian organisation, World Vision Zimbabwe has been able to use faith as a unifying influence to transform belief systems and overcome development obstacles.

Context

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country situated in the southern part of the African continent with a low level of development. It is a highly religious country, with 87.4% professing to the Christian faith and where 10% follow the traditional African religion. Of the Christian population, 37.5% identify with the Apostolic and Zionist Church, where some sections follow a mixture of conventional Christianity alongside more traditional African beliefs. 15% are members of Evangelical churches, with smaller groupings of those from Lutheran, Baptist and Catholic traditions. For most people religion plays a key role in everyday life in Zimbabwe and religious leaders are extremely influential when it comes to guiding the norms and values of communities.

WorldVision's experience of operating in Zimbabwe is positive; our Christian foundation serving as an advantage when it comes to working with religious leaders and communities who generally understand and appreciate our convictions. This is less the case for secular organisations who find it harder to engage with communities, or tackle deeply ingrained harmful practices, from a faith perspective. WorldVision enjoys the freedom to communicate our Christian roots and values clearly and openly. The high levels of Christian faith in Zimbabwe provide a platform for World Vision to work with government and church umbrella groups to create partnerships that support our common objectives for child wellbeing.



Above: Members of the Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe. The Union for the Development of the Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA) is a World Vision partner church in the IGATE project which empowers girls and breaks down barriers to education, enabling completion of their school years.
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Approach to Faith and Development

World Vision Zimbabwe has developed a five-year plan focussing on integrating faith and development into their wider strategy. As part of this, it provides staff with regular opportunities for spiritual reflection. These gatherings focus mainly on tackling issues faced by communities based on Christian values and are open to all staff. As there are few people of other faiths in the areas where World Vision works, opportunities to work together have been limited, but there is an openness to work with those of other faiths or none.

ZIMBABWE

Population: 14.5 million



87.4% **Christian (37.5% Apostolic Church)**
10.5% **Atheist**
2.1% **Traditional/Other faiths**

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html>

The influence of traditional beliefs and harmful social norms is to some degree evident everywhere in Zimbabwe, but World Vision's research suggests that they have a stronger influence in much of the Apostolic Church, as shown below.

- **Only 15% of Apostolic Church members believed that boys and girls should be given equal chance and priority to go to school, with education seen as having a corrupting influence on girls.**
- **84% of Apostolic Church members believed that girls/women, particularly virgins, aged between 16-23 years command the highest 'bride price'.**
- **Apostolic parents would commonly encourage or arrange for girls to be married off by age 18.**
- **Apostolic Church members traditionally avoid modern medicine with lower vaccination levels for children and only 35% of babies being delivered in health facilities.**

In programme areas where World Vision has engaged closely with the Apostolic Church, beliefs and attitudes are changing; reductions in child marriages and teenage pregnancies have been recorded and the number of girls in school has greatly increased as noted below.

In Zimbabwe the Apostolic Church is highly influential with up to 4 million members and recently World Vision Zimbabwe have increased their engagement with the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches, the umbrella organisation overseeing 650 Apostolic churches. Through reaching those in positions of the greatest influence within this section of the Church, greater impact has been seen as gradual changes in belief have cascaded down to the leaders of churches and communities and therefore to their members. Where in the past, few leaders would attend WW's Focus Group Meetings, there is now far greater willingness to attend and respond.

Faith-based Programming

World Vision Zimbabwe uses various project models where faith is a common denominator, providing vital links between us and the communities we are trying to reach:



Channels of Hope for Child Protection (CoH-CP)

is a programme methodology that motivates and builds capacity in faith communities to address harmful beliefs and practices towards children, to support and advocate for children's rights, to become better child protectors, and to ultimately strengthen the local child protection system. It is an interactive process which aims to create a safe space for faith leaders and communities to learn, share and debate. Through the CoH-CP model, a total of 511 church leaders were trained and through their work, over 85,000 congregants (men and women) were reached through the various church-based awareness programmes conducted by the trained pastors. World Vision continues to support the ongoing work of the Community Hope Action Teams formed by trained church leaders.

Implementation of Channels of Hope as a faith-based programme has had far reaching effects on gender equality and girls' education in Zimbabwe. Under the Improving Girls' Access Through Transforming Education (iGATE) project, leaders of the Apostolic Church most notably were engaged in CoH-CP, resulting in a reduction in girl child marriages and teenage pregnancies. Systems set up to report abuse as well as teachings on the legal implications of child marriage, have helped to instigate this change. In all districts where the CoH-CP model was implemented, the numbers of girls out of school has gone down.

“Girls used to be sexually abused, to be married by older men who were not of their own choices, were not expected to go beyond grade 7 but now because of teachings targeting church leaders and communities at large, all these practices are no longer prevalent”.

Primary school girl and Apostolic Church member in Mberengwa District



Strengthening WV's partnership with the church has been crucial in rolling out the It Takes a World to End Violence Against Children campaign in Zimbabwe. Trained church leaders have played a pivotal role in raising awareness on sexual violence and other child protection issues, with 51 child abuse cases reported in one year. This was due to improved community knowledge of child rights and the empowerment of children to report abuses, made possible through faith connections with the church.



Dare to Discover & Empowered World View

training combines creative approaches such as games, activities and reflection times. Such training has provided young people, primarily teenagers and from the Apostolic Church, with space to reflect about important aspects of their life such as their identity, their values, their sources of security and self-worth and their vision for the future. Groups of young people are then encouraged and empowered to set up income-generating projects such as chicken-rearing and bead-making. Some groups have been able to enlist the support of the local Council, which improves their sustainability and chances of long-term success. The Empowered World View training is Bible-based, emphasising a focus on the value of each individual, and that everyone has gifts and skills to provide for themselves.



Above: Literacy unlocked – boosting reading skills in Zimbabwe.
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The Celebrating Families (CF)

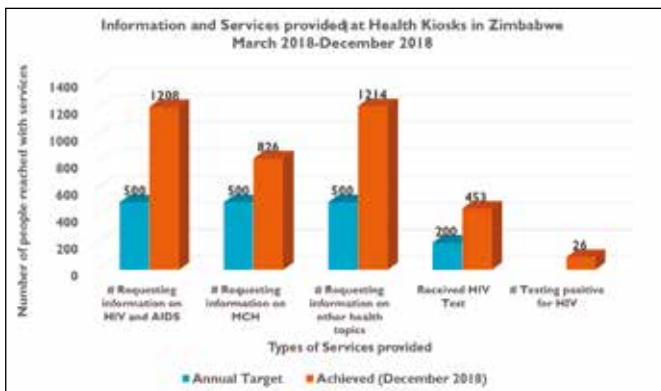
model equips parents/care givers and faith leaders with knowledge and skills to understand the importance of having a safe environment where children are loved and able to thrive. Furthermore, it increases positive parent-child relationships and attachment. Polygamous families are rife within the Apostolic Church and their participation in the Celebrating Families models has had a positive impact on their communities. The CF project model has helped to reduce incidences of abusive forms of child discipline, family conflicts, lack of love and care, lack of forgiveness and broken relationships.



Left: School holiday activities. © 2018 Marcus Simaitis/World Vision
Above right: Mr and Mrs Humbwe during Celebrating Families training in Buhera. @ 2019 Last Magaya/World Vision

Health-Programmes

Health Kiosks have created “safe spaces” for church congregants and other, non-faith groups to encourage each other to seek and access health care services and are playing a critical role in achieving UNAIDS’s targets to eradicate HIV by 2030. Faith leaders give short sermons on HIV, then church volunteers share information on HIV and make referrals for HIV testing. Those who are tested positive are linked to care and treatment at the health facility and followed up for retention. Those who tested negative are linked to health facilities for further HIV prevention services. This has enabled the Ministry of Health and Child Care to work directly with churches, which has enhanced access to health services.



World Vision undertook research on immunisation rates across their Area Development Programmes in Zimbabwe,

discovering that there are far lower levels of uptake in areas dominated by the Apostolic Church. **The Pfizer Immunisation Project** (funded by the Pfizer Foundation) targeted these areas as a result, working closely with the local faith leaders. Immunisation rates increased by 23% in the two Districts it focussed on, through changes in attitudes to health clinics.

Conclusion

World Vision Zimbabwe provides a powerful example of the ways in which the organisation’s Christian values can enable it to create lasting change in the lives of children, families and communities. Across Zimbabwe, World Vision is well known and respected for its values, actions, and commitments to partners, state service providers and other actors. World Vision’s openness to share and discuss faith issues with religious influencers enables them to encourage faith leaders to partner with them for the well-being of children and to tackle some of the root causes of poverty and injustice. This has enabled bridges to be built and harmful attitudes and behaviours to be transformed, particularly for some of the most vulnerable children and women in Zimbabwe.

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Front cover photo: Israel Church Annual Gathering. © 2018 World Vision

World Vision is a Christian organisation, working with people of all faiths and none, to transform the lives of the world's most vulnerable children.

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