

THE CHURCH FORUM

ON HIV & AIDS

ANNUAL Report



Reporting Period:

JANUARY – DECEMBER 2019

The Church Forum on HIV/AIDS is a coalition of the three main bodies in Swaziland, namely; Council of Eswatini Churches, the League of African Churches, and the Eswatini Conference of Churches as well as non-affiliated churches which are as the Eswatini Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the International Tabernacle Ministries. It was founded in 1999 to contribute to the multi-sectoral HIV/AIDS response.

VISION

An AIDS Free Eswatini through an effective and coordinated response by the church

MISSION STATEMENT

To champion the Christian HIV & AIDS response through coordinated and comprehensive intervention strategies at National, Regional, and Local church level

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2019

PROJECT NAME: Scaling up of Early Childhood Development Services for Young Children with Special Needs

PROJECT PURPOSE: To improve the quality of life for children with disabilities by enabling them to access high quality early childhood development services designed to reach the most vulnerable children delivered through skilled caregivers in Neighbourhood Care Points.

INTRODUCTION

Children with disabilities tend to experience numerous problems growing up for example lack of stimulation, stigma and discrimination associated with disability, lack of assistive device, ect. Many children with disabilities are identified late and there is little or no interventions targeting them. While numerous efforts have been made to reach out to children in communities through Neighbourhood Care points (NCPs), preschools and other early childhood development centers, children with special needs are still not adequately reached due to communication barriers, lack of trained care health workers or caregivers. This project facilitated the launch of a training manual called “Early Childhood Development for Children with Special Needs”. Caregivers from NCPs were trained on the manual to assist them during their work.

Caregiver’s training manual on ECCDE for children with special needs and disabilities



A follow up meeting after the development of the manual in 2018, was conducted for stakeholders’ on the 30th of January 2019 at the Church forum conference to summarize and simplify the manual. Participants were from the Ministry of Education (Special Education Needs), Cheshire Homes, AMICAAL, Family transformation, ADRA, FODSWA, International Tabernacle Care Foundation and League of churches. The

manual was summarized and preparations for the launch of the manual were made.

Translation of Caregivers Training Manual

A consultant (Mrs. Gcebile Malaza) a SiSwati lecturer from the University of Eswatini was engaged to translate the caregivers' manual to the local language or siSwati. Mrs. Malaza was selected because of her vast experience in the SiSwati language. She gained this experience while working for the National Curriculum Centre. The manual was translated to SiSwati during the month of February 2019 and presented to partners during a meeting held in the Church forum boardroom on 27 March 2019. On that day preparations for the launch of the manual were made which include the selection of speakers, people to invite, performances and other proceedings of the special day.

Launch of the Caregivers' Training Manual

The caregivers training manual was launched for use in an event held at Happy Valley Hotel on 15 May 2019 at Ezulwini. 85 people from Government ministries, Developmental partners, Caregivers, Tertiary institutions, Faith Based Organizations, People with disabilities and Parents of children with disabilities attended the event. Keynote Speech by Mr. Lucky Ndlovu, Director of the National Children Service Department who talked about the importance of ECCDE, policies protection children and institutions of referral for children with special needs and disabilities in Eswatini.



Image: Speaker from FODSWA



Image: Participants after they receive the manual

Other speakers were from Federation of Disabled Persons in Swaziland (FODSWA), Ministry of Education and Training (Special Education Needs and Early Childhood Care Development & Education), The Southern African Nazarene University (SANU), Family Transformation and a Caregiver. They were all advocating for people and children with disabilities and special needs.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS ON CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

The organization conducted meetings to sensitize community members on special needs and disabilities of children. The community meetings were meant to help children with disabilities and special needs to be identified and assisted early by caregivers through the support of community members. In 2019 a total of 25 community meetings were conducted in different

NCPs reaching 739 people. Topics discussed during the meetings include; Definition of disability, people or children with special needs, types of disabilities, Myths & misconception, the terminology use that does not discriminate children with disabilities and places of referral.

A survey was conducted in the first 5 communities; Phuzamoya, Hlatsi, Motjane, Bethany and Maphungwane to see if the community members had gained knowledge on children with special needs and disabilities after the meetings. Participants were required to fill in a pre-test and post-test evaluation test. Due to challenges only 92 people were able to do the pre and post evaluation because some people came to the meeting late, other left blank spaces on the form and could not read or write.

After each meeting the community members were able to assist the caregivers to identify

Results indicated that all participants knew the commonly known disabilities like visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech disorder and physical impairment but less information on kinds of disabilities. The various methods of identification and screening disability were well known by all the participants. 51% of the participants were not clear significance or importance of the early childhood development. 41% of the participants were not clear on the laws protecting children At the end of the each meeting the participants had knowledge about other kinds of disabilities like Intellectual disabilities, Autism, Albinism, learning difficulty and Social, Emotional and Behavioral difficulties, the significance or importance of the early childhood development, the laws protecting children e.g the Children's Protection & welfare Act 2019, and referral places for disability in the country.

children to be referred and linked to the services they needed. In some communities the community leaders also attend the meetings were happy that the project is assisting in the referral of children with special needs and disabilities.



Images: Community meeting at Phuzumoya NCP (Lubombo) and Bethany (Manzini)

Myths and misconception regarding disabilities were corrected. The participants were provided with Facts regarding disability and were encouraged to use the right terminology that does not discriminate children or people with disabilities. The community members were very happy

about the project because they said there are many children with disabilities and special needs who needed support but due to lack money could not access services.

REFERRAL OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

Referral forms were distributed in the NCPs during field visits and to caregiver during trainings or community meetings to be used to identify children with special needs and disabilities in their communities. Finding children with special needs were been a challenge in some communities, parents still do not bring them to the NCPs. In some communities the children identified were over the age required for the target population, the parents did not want assistance, some parents preferred traditional services. Among the children identified and referred the parents of these children have also consented for their children to be provided with the referral services,3 children were referred in 2019;

- A 4 year old from Hlatsikhulu was referred to an ear specialist in Manzini because one of ear had a problem
- A 5 year old girl from Maphungwane who was un-able to speak because she had 2 tongues was identified. The child was taken to FRM hospital in Manzini in August 2019 but was referred to Mbabane hospital and met the only Doctor Specialist on the 3rd of September.
- A 10 year old boy with a mental disorder and paralysed on the right side was referred to the psychiatric in November 2019 for services. The mother of te child was taught how to care for the child.

Neighbourhood Operation Video Production

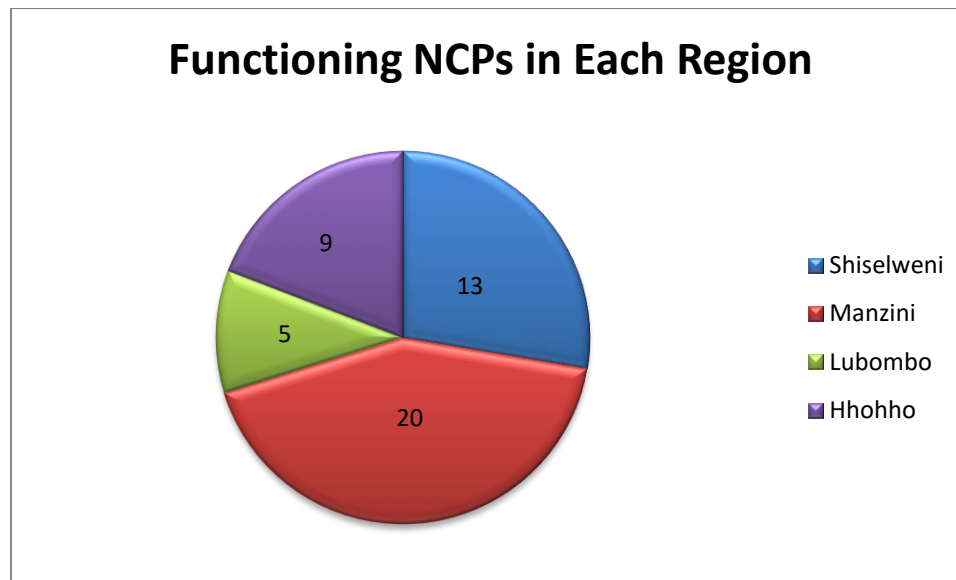
A consultant from Enabling Education Network from UK was hired by OSISA to produce a video of the operation of NCPs. The NCP at Mahlabaneni was identified where a documentary was made on how the NCP operate. The Mahlabaneni NCP is unique because it has NCP providing ECDE services to 43 children and an orphanage which house 15 children. The video captured the children in the NCP when they come to school, when they are in class, after school and the caregivers' preparations before class. The video also captured the children in the orphanage. The final video will be ready 2020.

Neighbourhood Care Point Database Update

The caregivers assist the organization in updating the NCP database in the different parts of the country. The Neighbourhood Care Point database was continuously updated with the assistance of caregivers. More NCPs were identified resulting in Last quarter there were 54 NCPs and currently there are 74 but out of the total NCPs in the database only 47 are fully functional. The same problem was noted in the newly identified NCPs, that most NCPs shut down or stopped operating due to lack of food. This has resulted in some of the structures being abandoned or

falling apart due to negligence. Even though some NCPs continued to operate through donations from their churches and communities the supply for food is not frequent.

The diagram below shows the number of functioning NCPs in each region;



The 27 non functional or closed NCPs are; 5 in Shiselweni, 13 in Manzini, 3 in Lubombo and 6 in Hhohho respectively. Reasons for closer vary with the NCPs for example; lack of food, establishment competitive of a community NCP, no stipend for caregivers and no children. The NCPs are now visited and monitored close more frequently to ensure they continue to operate and the caregivers are motivated to continue assisting and attending to children.

Refresher training for Caregivers

A refresher training was conducted for caregivers at SISEMA in Manzini on the 28th – 31st of October 2019. A total of 48 caregivers in NCPs from the 4 regions attended the training. The main aim for the training was to remind the caregivers what they had learnt the previous year and to also teach the new caregivers how to care or address children with special needs. The topics covered during the training included Early Childhood Care Development and Education, Special Needs education and Basic Sign Language. Facilitators of the training were from The School for the Deaf and Ministry of Education and Training (ECD and SEN department).

Project name: Swaziland Churches Engaging in Social and Economic Justice Issues

Project purpose: To reduce the percentage of people living with HIV and aids who experience stigma and discrimination and to reduce the vulnerability of households to HIV & GBV in 8 communities (Ndzingeni, Nkwalini, Malkerns, Ndumisweni, Nyamane, Hlatsikhulu, Maphungwane and Mahlabaneni).

Eswatini has made significant progress in addressing the HIV epidemic through the years. Even though a lot has been done in relation to HIV, stigma and discrimination of PLHIV still exist in some communities including the church. Church forum has a huge role to play in order to promote the reduction of Stigma and discrimination, for example;

- Helping members of the church understand their Christian calling to fight Stigma and discrimination
- Bring to the open the sinful nature of Stigma and discrimination
- Enable church members to use the bible as a tool to fight against Stigma and discrimination

The project supported the review of the Stigma and Discrimination manual for the church to be used by Pastors and congregants. Savings and Credits Schemes were established to improve the economic status of caregivers and community members.

ACTIVITIES & ACHEIVEMENT

Weekly Radio Programme on HIV Stigma and Discrimination Reduction

The organization started the radio programme in August 2018 and the show was meant to be on air until February 2019 on the Voice of the Church radio (VOC) station. The programme conducted shows on different topics regarding HIV and AIDS were different speakers were invited. On the last day of airing The Advocacy & Communication Officer, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer and the Field Officer were on the show to present the work of Church Forum to listeners. Listeners were given the number to call for further questions regarding Church Forum's programmes.

Training Manual for Reducing Stigma and Discrimination in the Church

Reviewing the HIV Stigma and discrimination manual began in November 2018 where Church leaders held meetings to review the manual. A validation meeting was held on the 20th of March 2019 at the George Hotel. Participants were drawn from Counsel of Swaziland Churches (CSC),

Swaziland Conference of Churches (SCC), the League of African Independent Churches (LAIC), International Tabernacle (I T) and the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA). The process was led by the Advocacy and Communication Officer, who noted the comments of the church leader and added them in the Reviewed manual. The manual was then translated to Siswati.

Topics covered in the manual include;

- *What is the cause of stigma and discrimination?*
- *What does the Bible say about stigma and discrimination?*
- *What is the role of the Church in addressing stigma and discrimination issues?*

The manual seeks to address some of the above-mentioned issues. It further argues that the Church should and must provide refuge and comfort for those hurting because Pastors, church leaders and the entire congregation have a huge responsibility to show love and compassion for the lonely, infected and affected. The manual is a guide to the Church as to how best to fight HIV stigma and discrimination, first within the Church and then by the Church in the communities. After reviewing the manual it was translated to Siswati. Both English and Siswati version were printed out for distribution.

Orientation on Contextual Bible Study Model

A Church Leaders' training was conducted at Global Village on the 26th – 28th March 2019 for 40 church Leaders. The overall objective of the training was to orient Church Leaders on Contextual bible study model to engage on socio-economic issues and sought buy-in of Church leaders for project support at community level. *Contextual bible study (CBS)* is an interactive study of bible texts to raise awareness and transformation. CBS is only a tool which helps open up the process to discuss issues which are important in church and society.

Different CBS themes discussed:

- **Land** - *It was discussed using supporting verses on Deuteronomy 28 verse 11 and Mathew 26.*
- **Tax** - *Church leaders were encouraged to pay tax, as stated in the bible. This was supported by verses as follows: Mark 12: 13 – 17, Romans 13:1-7.*

- **Poverty Lessening/ Reducing** - To preach the gospel to the poor since it was part of prophetic tradition to help the poor (Luke 4: 16 – 22, Mathew 13: 54 – 58, Mark 6:1-6 and Isaiah 61: 1).

Another presentation was on Demographic Dividends in Swaziland Mr P. Dlamini from Economic Planning.

Community Dialogues: Contextual bible Study Model

The dialogues were a follow up of the orientation training of Church Leaders on Contextual Bible study model which was conducted in March. From that training 16 Church leaders were identified to apply the knowledge they gained in their communities. 8 community dialogues were conducted in Nkwalini, Ndumisweni, Malkerns, Maphungwane, Mahlabaneni, Nyamane, Hlatsikhulu and Ndzingeni.

During the dialogues community members were able to identify challenges that affect the society which include; Violence (Gender based violence and sexual abuse), Poverty, Youth Unemployment, Stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV, Child headed homes and high rates of divorce, etc. The church leaders looked at bible verses which addressed those challenges and also looking at the laws of the country (The constitution of Eswatini).

Orientation of Church Leaders on the Sexual Offense and Domestic Violence (SODV) Act 2018

A training to orient 38 Church Leaders on the SODV Act 2018 was conducted on 10-12 September at Alcon House in Manzini. A pre-test evaluation test was conducted at the beginning of the workshop and the results were 32% knowledge on the SODV Act. Mr Mzwandile Masuku from the Foundation for social Justice was facilitating during the workshop.

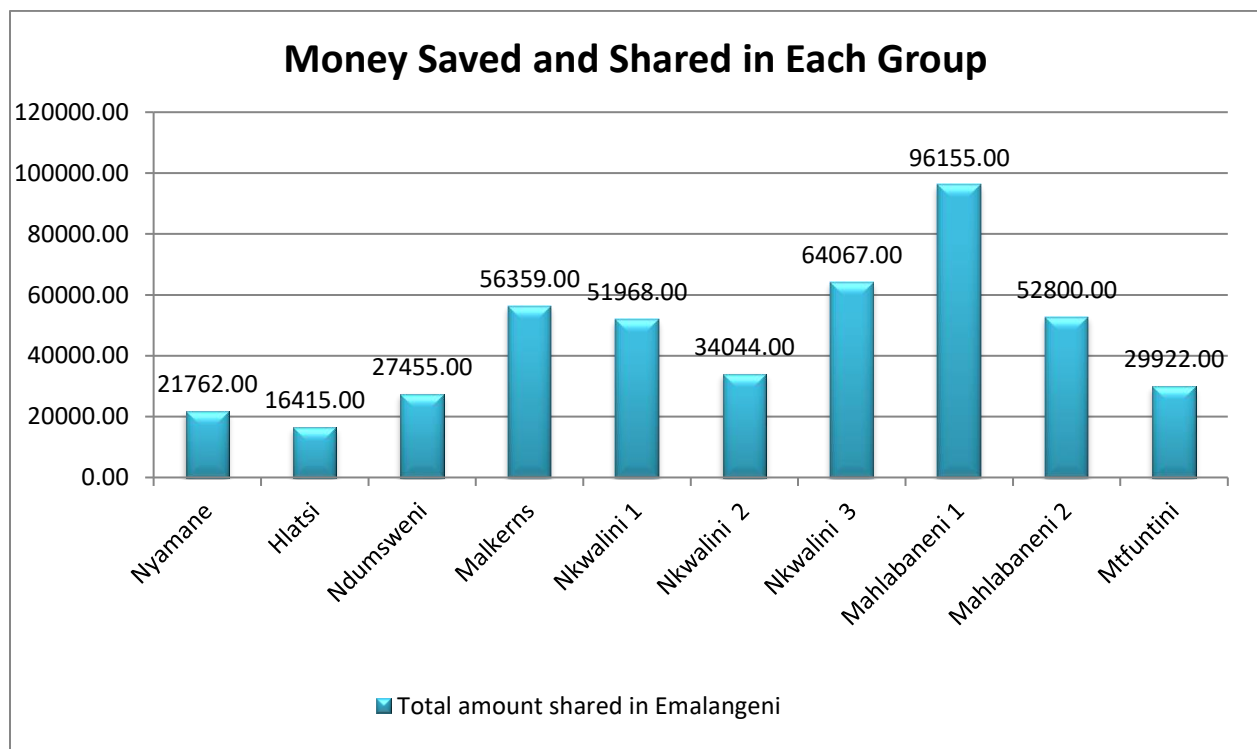
He talked about the International Legal Framework which include; the rights to life, Freedom from torture, Freedom from slavery, the right to liberty and security and Freedom of religion, expression and assembly. He then presented on the Act elaborating more on each section so that the Church Leaders can have a clear understanding of the document. At the end of the workshop a post evaluation test conducted and the results indicated knowledge increased among the church leaders as they got a score of 70%. The Church leaders were happy to learn that the act is not meant to oppress men but protects every one.

SAVINGS GROUP MEETINGS

Ten savings and credits groups were established in Nyamane, Hlatsikhulu, Ndzingeni, kaGwebu, Malkerns, 3 groups in Nkwalini and 2 groups in Mahlabaneni. The groups met once every month,

where they saved and borrowed money at an interest of 10%. Members follow their constitutions in terms of loan repayment, keeping time, paying fines and they respect each other.

November and December 2019 marked the end of the cycle (one year) of the establishment and operation of the 10 savings and credits groups. The interest was shared among members of the group according to the shareholding of each member. Throughout the year the groups were being supervised and monitored by the Field officer to ensure the smooth operation of the groups. By December all the groups had shared the money they saved among them. The total number of group members that formed the 10 groups was 217 members and the total amount saved throughout the year by the saving groups was E450, 947.00 which is shown in the diagram below;



The different groups will continue to save in 2020. The success of the 10 savings and credit group had led to the formation of additional new groups in some communities for example Malkerns now has 2 groups and Nkwalini has 4 groups.

PROJECT NAME: Engaging Religious Leaders on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRRH)

PROJECT PURPOSE: To strengthen capacity of religious leaders and parents on comprehensive sexuality education and health providers on adolescents and the youth.

The message preached in churches is that of abstinence, even though there is overwhelming evidence that young people in church also engage in sex, like their peers who are out of the church. The church is dealing with the same problems affecting the youth everywhere which include HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, peer pressure, drug abuse and other issues. This project seeks to harmonize the SRH messages offered to the youth by supporting the development, dissemination and implementation of guidelines or training materials on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights to be used by church leaders and parents.

ACTIVITIES & ACHIEVEMENT

NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS CONSULTATIVE MEETING

A workshop to orient selected Church Leaders on the project was conducted at the George Hotel on the 24th- 25th June 2019. A total of 34 Church Leaders from the 3 main church bodies that form Church Forum attended the workshop, namely; The Council of Churches, The Conference of Churches and the League of African Independent Churches. The purpose of the meeting was to: introduce the project to Church Leaders, *present the work plan to the Church Leaders*, lastly present and review *the Final National Youth Manual on Life Skills Education for out of School Youth* and to make it user friendly for the youth in church

The Ministry of Health was invited to present on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health, Teenage pregnancy and the role of the Church in Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health. Church leaders were encouraged to ensure that adolescents and the youth are empowered with knowledge on sexual reproductive health and HIV issues which will help them to make informed decisions.

Review of the manual was incomplete during the workshop, so a small committee consisting of 7 church leaders was identified to finish the part of the manual that was left. The committee met on the 31st of July 2019 at Church Forum Boardroom and went through the whole manual. A follow up meeting for all the church leaders in the project was conducted on the 13th of August 2019 at Sister's Servants (SISEMA) in Manzini. During this meeting the small committee presented to the rest of the group and the church leaders identified the very important topics to be covered during the youth leader's training. The church leaders also assisted in identifying the youth leaders to be trained on the manual.

Training of Youth Leaders from different churches on SRHR, HIV and SGBV

A 4-day training for 43 Youth Leaders (27 females and 16 males, respectively) was conducted at SISEMA in Manzini on the 27th to 30th of August 2019. The Youth Leaders were from the 4 regions

of the country representing 27 churches. Their ages ranged from 15 years to 30 years. The main objectives of the workshop was: To increase the number of girls reached with structured Life Skills Education in churches through peer education, To empower the youth in church with Life Skills Education to make informed decisions related to SRHR and to train youth in church on Peer Education for delivery of Life Skills Education in church.

The training was facilitated by Youth Affairs Manager Ms Philile Malindzisa- Simelane, from Family Life Association (FLAS). Other presentation made during the training included; Sexual Reproductive Health – The Life Skill Education Manual, Short and long term goals, How to deal with challenges, Relationships, Teenage pregnancy, Sexual Transmitted Infections, Contraceptives types, Gender Based Violence, Sexuality, Communication, Drug and Alcohol abuse and Leadership skills.



Image: Participants of the workshop

The participants of the training were oriented on a tool by the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer which they used to cascading the information to other youth members in their different churches. After the training Youth Leaders were able to train 220 youth members from their different churches.

YOUTH SPORT DAY TO COMMEMORATE THE WORLD AIDS

A youth sport tournament to commemorate the World AIDS Day was conducted in the Lubombo region on the 23rd of November 2019. The event was held at the Siteki Sport ground reaching 430 youth members from different churches within the Lubombo region. Poems to promote HIV prevention were also presented by the youth. There was a mobile clinic from AMICAAL to provide HIV Testing Services to the youth. A motivational speaker from the Swaziland Young Positive made a speech to encourage the youth to promote abstinence. Posters with messages commemorating the World AIDS Day were put on display.



Different games which include soccer, netball, volley boy and other fun games were played on that day. At the end of that day the winning teams for the different sports were awarded medals and trophies.

SUCSESSES

- The attendance during the training of the Church leaders and the youth leaders was good, with participant fully participating.
- Some youth leaders after the training cascaded the information they learnt in their churches reaching 220 youth member.

- Saving groups were meeting frequently, consistently and able to shared the money among themselves
- More caregivers were reached and trained on refresher training on Early Childhood Care Development and Education, Special Needs education and Basic Sign Language.
- Church leaders were trained on SODV Act 2018.

CHALLENGES

- The time for the conducting the trainings was not enough such that some topics covered were not done to the end.
- Some saving group members do not attend meeting every month
- Shortage of food a challenge and results in closure of some NCPs.
- Since caregivers are doing their work voluntarily, the ECD teachers tend to leave the NCPs to teach in pre-schools because preschools are able to pay them.
- More community members want to join savings group but due to lack of finance to buy metal box and booklets there could not form new groups.
- Identifying children 0-8 with disabilities and special needs in the different communities is a challenge.
- Some youth leaders did no disseminate the information they received during the training to other youth members in their churches.

LESSON LEARNT

- More days for the Life Skills Education training for the youth are needed because some topics require more time to be fully covered.
- Frequently visiting the savings groups and NCPs during their meeting ensures smooth operation.
- People are willing to change their attitude towards children with special needs and disabilities if they have the right information
- Partnering with community leaders ensures the smooth running of activities at community level
- Community meetings changed the attitudes of people on children with special needs and promoted the reduction of stigma towards children with disabilities.
- Team work was very important to ensure the manual was launch.

- Church Leaders have a huge role to play in educating young people on life skills education so need to know their congregants in order to identify their needs
- Most of the parents lack the rightful information on SRH themselves especially young parents which makes it difficult for them to be provided SRH to their children.
- Unity among neighboring churches and communities makes sure that all young people are in involved
- All children with or without disabilities must have the same opportunities to access ECCDE services so that they can take part in meaningful daily activities that add to their growth and development.
- Children with special needs and disabilities have much in common with children of their

CONCLUSION

If church members have adequate information on sexual reproductive health and HIV issues there will be a reduction in issues affecting the youth in the country in general. The manual with the information on adolescent sexual reproductive health will provided to church leaders to guide they when offering information to the youth. With the right information on children with special needs and disabilities provide to people, awareness is raised during the community meetings. The Caregiver's Training Manual on children with special needs and disabilities is now available for use. Caregivers need a lot of support so that children with special needs and disabilities can be brought to the NCPs for ECCDE services. Lastly, the savings groups have changed the lives of many community members; they have been able to save money which benefit them at the end of the year.