

**THE CHURCH FORUM
ON HIV & AIDS**

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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Introduction

The Eswatini Church Forum on HIV/AIDS is a non-governmental institution formed through an accord ratified by the five main church bodies in the Kingdom of Eswatini, namely; Council of Eswatini Churches, the League of African Churches, the Eswatini Conference of Churches, the Eswatini Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the International Tabernacle Ministries as well as other Faith based organizations categorized as non-affiliated churches. It was founded in 1999 as a strategic initiative by the multi-sectorial HIV/AIDS response unit in the country.

Vision

An HIV/AIDS free Eswatini through an effective and coordinated response by the church.

Mission

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

The year 2020 has presented an unprecedented change in the work of Church Forum. This year, the organisation witnessed a global pandemic to an overall change in strategy to better cater for the people. The Corona virus also known as Covid-19 presented a major challenge in the way Eswatini responds to societal issues as gatherings were then banned, of which it automatically disrupted the working system of providing its services to the people. Below is a comprehensive report on how the organisation juggled around its resources to make sure that the people are not neglected for each project for the year 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

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

Project Area: Manzini, Shiselweni, Hhohho and Lubombo

INTRODUCTION

Children with disabilities tend to experience numerous problems growing up for example; lack of stimulation, stigma and discrimination associated with disability and lack of assistive device. 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 Neighborhood 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”. The manual was translated, printed and disseminate in 2019. Caregivers from NCPs were trained on the manual to assist them during their work.

Refresher Training for Caregiver on Early Childhood Care Development and Education, Special Needs education and Basic Sign Language

A refresher training on Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECDE), Special Education Needs (SEN) and Basic Sign Language was conducted for 49 caregiver. There was an in-depth presentation of manual where there caregivers put their views and comments regarding topics discussed. The translated manual to Siswati was shared with the caregiver for use in their NCPs. The referral tool to be used to identify children with special needs was presented and shared with the caregivers to assist them while working with children that need to be referred for services. At the end of the training the caregivers were able to communicate in sign language and the stated that the knowledge they gained during the training will make their work easy in the NCPs.

Community Meetings on Children with Special Needs and Disabilities

- Community meetings to sensitise community members on children with special needs and disabilities were conducted in 20 NCPs with the assistance of Caregivers who mobilized people to



attend the meetings. By the end of 2020 community meetings were conducted in 48 NCPs raising awareness for 1369 community members. 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. 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 of money could not access services. In some meetings the community leaders also attend the meetings and were eager in assisting the caregivers in the referral of children with special needs and disabilities.

Referral of Children with Special needs and disability

The Community meetings facilitated the identification and referral of children with special need and disabilities in the different communities to service providers. Caregivers used the referral tool to register the children and the organization assisted with transport and medical bills. Below are the stories of change of children with special needs and disabilities that were referred;

Story 1: Nokuphila Dlamini a 5 year old girl from Maphungwane in the Lubombo region who was unable to speak properly because she had 2 tongues was identified and referred to the FRM hospital in Manzini in August 2019 but was transferred to only Doctor Specialist in Mbabane Government hospital who can help her. On the 3rd of September 2019 she was attended by the Doctor who scheduled her for an operation. The operation was done and she is now able to speak clearly.

Story 2: Bayanda Nyambe a boy who is 4 years old from Ndzingeni in the Hhohho region was referred to the Psychiatric Centre in Manzini to be examined. Since birth he had body fits, cannot talk properly and is mentally challenged. His mother had taken him to different hospital but they did not provide help. At the Psychiatric Centre he was provided with medication to help with the fits. He now attends the NCP at Ndzingeni.

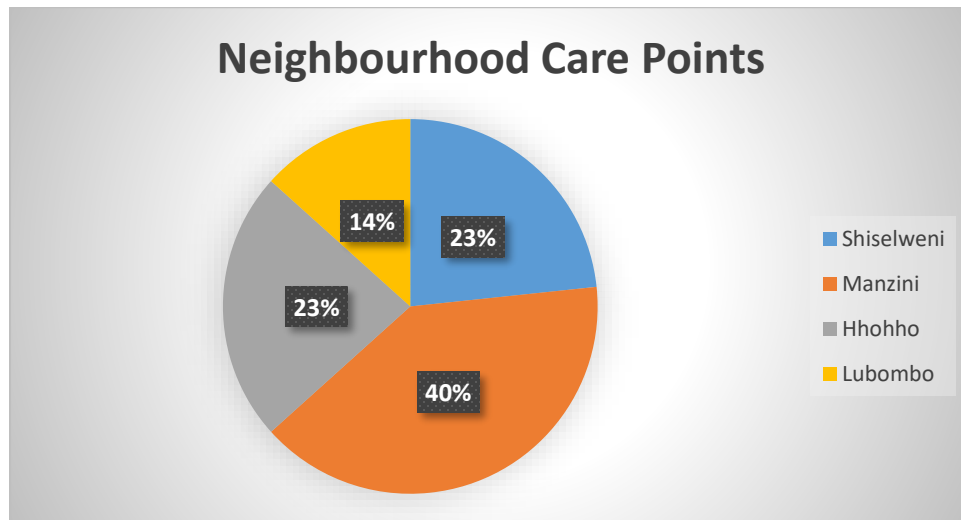
Story 3: A 2 year old boy who is physically impaired (cannot walk) from Nsukumbili in the Hhohho region was referred to Cheshire Home for services. After assessment it was stated that he had to undergo physiotherapy

Story 4: 2 children from Nkoyoyo (4 years and 7 years, respectively) who were not able to walk were referred to Luke Commission Hospital in Sidvokodvo where they were provided with wheel chairs to make movement easier.

Story 5: In a community called Dvumbe in the Shiselweni region, a 10 year old boy who has a mental disability and paralyzed on the right hand was referred to the psychiatric Centre in Manzini to be examined. The child will do physiotherapy and the mother was taught how to care for the child.

Update ECD Centre database

The ECD centre or Neighbourhood Care Point (NCP) database has been continuously updated with more NCPs being identified. A total of 90 NCPs are now in the database but out of the total only 47 NCPs are fully functional. Inactive NCPs is due to lack of food or no kids which has resulted in some of the NCP 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 NCPs in each region;



Manzini region has the majority of NCPs compare to the other regions followed by the Shiselweni region. The NCPs are now frequently visited and monitored to ensure they continue to function well and to motivate the caregivers to continue assisting and attending to children. Some inactive NCPs have been revived and have started functioning again.

Video on Early Childhood Development in Neighborhood Care Points

A consultant from Enabling Education Network from UK visited 1 NCP to produce a video of how an NCP operation in Eswatini. The Mahlabaneni NCP 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.

PROJECT NAME: **Repackaging SRHR Services for Young People in Religious Settings**

Project Area: Manzini, Shiselweni, Hhohho and Lubombo

INTRODUCTION

There has been a realisation that social behaviour change communication messages for young people are competing against each other in schools and at home. The church further complicates things by insisting on the abstinence message without realising that these young people have already had access to different messages. This notion, sometimes forgets that some of the young people in the church have already tasted sexual pleasures and they need something more than abstinence. This project proposes a strategy of repackaging the message contained in the Life Skill Education training manual and make it ready for use in religious settings. The project facilitated the development of information education communication (IEC) materials dealing with stigma and discrimination toward HIV/AIDS and raising awareness on maternal health issues, SRHR, HIV/AIDS and GBV issues in the church and communities.

NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS CONSULTATIVE MEETING

There was a National Consultation meeting for 19 Church leaders at conducted at the George Hotel in Manzini from the 16th - 19th June 2019. The purpose of the meeting was to review the Life Skills Education (LSE) National manual for out of school youth and to make it user friendly for the youth in church. The manual was adapted to suit Christian value so as to address sensitive sexuality issues while preserving the integrity of Christian moral standards. The church leaders identified bible verses that correspond with each topic.

HOMESTEAD HEADS TRAINING ON SRHR, HIV AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION.

On the 18th to the 19th of August 2020, 45 Homesteads heads attended a two days' workshop held at The George Hotel. Facilitators from NERCHA, Ministry of Health and Man Engage Eswatini presented on HIV prevention (ARVs, PEP, PREP, Voluntary male medical circumcision (VMMC), condoms and Sexually

Transmitted Infections), Covid 19 (regulations, prevention and crisis communication), Gender based violence (Gender, Gender equity and Sexual abuse), and HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination (Self stigma and Associated stigma).

National Church Youth Leadership Training On SRHR, HIV And Gender Based Violence.

The “2020 Youth peer educators training” was aimed at raising awareness on gender-based violence prevention, to promote new behavioural health attitudes among young generations in the prevention of HIV and AIDS, and Sexually Transmitted Infections. The trainings targeted out-of-school young people in the church, aged 18-29 years who will act as agents of change among their peers on issues related to the youth in the church of The Kingdom of Eswatini. Thirty Five youth leaders participated in the training representing 23 churches.



Images: Youth leaders from churches trained on SRHR, HIV and GBV.

The young people were also trained on issues related to the social construction of gender, HIV prevention, Covid-19 regulations and prevention, drugs abuse and the values of a young person within the Christian faith.

ENGAGING THE YOUTH ON SRHR, HIV PREVENTION AND SGBV PREVENTION

To commemorate the World AIDS day the one day tournament was split into four smaller regional tournament. The tournaments were conducted in Ntontozi, Mbangweni, Malindza and Nkaba. Young people in those areas were engaged on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), HIV prevention, and Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Overall, a total of 447 young people (194 males and 253 females). In all four events there were Motivational speakers from the Eswatini Network of Young Positives.

Project name: Congregational Response to HIV and AIDS for Eswatini Churches

Project Area: Manzini, Hhohho, Lubombo and Shiselweni

INTRODUCTION

There is still stigma and discrimination in our communities, both at family level and even at the Church level. Church forum is a rapport among churches and church leaders of the 5 church bodies so that the church is united in advocacy of any of the issues that the church is involved in, especially HIV and AIDS, gender equality and violence against children and youth. Poverty also poses a challenge in the fight against HIV and AIDS pandemic. Poor people are susceptible to loan sharks, who give those loans and in turn charge very high interest rates, which put poor people into indebtedness and more poverty. Savings groups are developed whereby members buy shares and the share amount is agreed by the group. They create a pool of funds, which they then use to borrow money from and this money is paid back with 10% interest. The interest is shared at the end of the year among members according to the number of shares.

SAVINGS AND CREDIT GROUPS MONITORING AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2020 ten Savings and Credit Groups were developed and were a success, which has encouraged the need for formation of new Savings Groups in other communities. The purpose of the savings and credit groups' development is to improve the economic situation of caregivers working in NCPs, churches and youth. 359 community members joined and benefited from the saving groups. The project has continued to monitor the savings groups that have been established in the first phase. The total amount in Emalangeni saved was E1,106,468.00 which is shown in the diagram below;

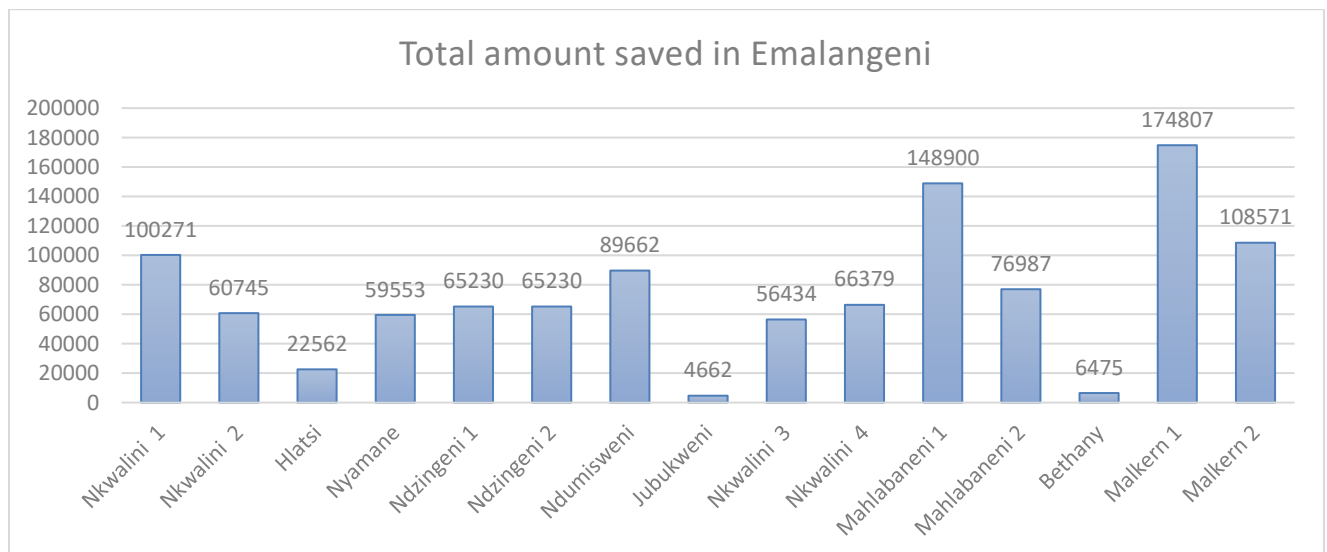


Figure: Savings group their total savings in 2020

NATIONAL PLANNING AND COORDINATION MEETING

There was a National Planning and Coordination Meeting for 17 church leaders held at Alcon house in Manzini. The purpose of the meeting was the review the Church forum 2014-2019 strategy, consult on the Church forum 2020-2025 strategy and revive the regional committees. After presenting the old strategy the church leaders assisted in the development of the new strategy. The Church forum Strategy of 2020-2025 have 5 thematic areas namely; Health (HIV/AIDS, Covid-19), Sexual reproductive health, Inclusive Education and Economic empowerment.

REGIONAL PLANNING AND COORDINATION MEETING

Following the national planning and coordination meeting and as part of information sharing, 4 regional planning and coordination meetings were conducted in all the four regions (Shiselweni, Manzini, Hhohho and Lubombo). The meeting targeted church Leaders with main aim to revive the regional committees. A total of 64 Church leaders were reached in the 4 meetings. During the meetings we were able to share the work of Church Forum and strategic plan to the church leaders. By the end of 2020 only 1 regional committee was established in the Lubombo region. The other 3 region postponed the selection of committee member to January 2021 because they felt the churches were no well represented from the different mother bodies.

RADIO PROGRAMME

The radio programme called *Teluleko nge HIV Emabandleni* (Advice on HIV in the Churches) airs every Thursday at 7:00 pm on the VOC SiSwati radio station. Though the programme was mainly to discuss information about stigma and discrimination related to HIV, it has expanded to cover a variety of issues including Sexual Gender Based Violence, Food Security, Women and children rights and other developmental issues pressing in the communities served by the project. The programme hosts church leaders from different churches and Health expects to advocate for the issues of concern to them. Different speakers were hosted during the show.

PROJECT NAME: Eswatini Faith and Community Initiative (FCI)

Project Area: Manzini, Shiselweni, Hhohho and Lubombo

INTRODUCTION

Eswatini is one of the ten countries that benefited from the U.S President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) fund that was allocated for faith based initiatives. The initiative is called Faith and Community Initiative (FCI). The main purpose of FCI is to address key gaps toward achieving HIV epidemic control and ensuring justice for children, including leveraging the unique capacities and compassion of faith-based organizations and communities. In Eswatini the Project is coordinated by Eswatini Church Forum (ECF) in collaboration with the Eswatini Ministry of Health (MoH)

Project implementation started in March 2020 whereby a National Faith & Community Initiative (FCI) Program Manager was recruited. The Program Manager is working with the Ministry of Health, PEPFAR, Church Forum, PEPFAR Implementing Partners, churches and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate and coordinate the FCI. The Program Manager facilitates this work through the guidance of the FCI Technical Working Group and all other structures of the Church Forum.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FCI TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

The technical working group (TWG) was established which is a structure of the Church Forum as body to guide the implementation of the FCI. The FCI TWG is made of 13 members selected from the five (5) Church mother bodies, MOH, the FCI Coordinator, PEPFAR, Implementing Partners (URC, ICAP, PSI and CMS) and the Eswatini National AIDS Program. Its main function is to provide guidance to mother bodies and denominations within them on the implementation of the faith and community initiative. The TWG has been meeting monthly to review progress reports on the implementation of the FCI project. The only change was the transitioning of two members which was FC4 and URC respectively, therefore, another organization had to take over which was The Luke Commission (TLC).

MESSAGE OF HOPE FAITH LEADERS' WORKSHOP.

Church leaders from the churches involved in the FCI project were identified and participated in a workshop oriented on HIV101. During the workshop the Church leaders also developed Messages of Hope aimed at engaging communities of faith to understand the epidemic, raise community awareness, and bring critical prevention and treatment interventions to men, women and children with testing and HIV services.

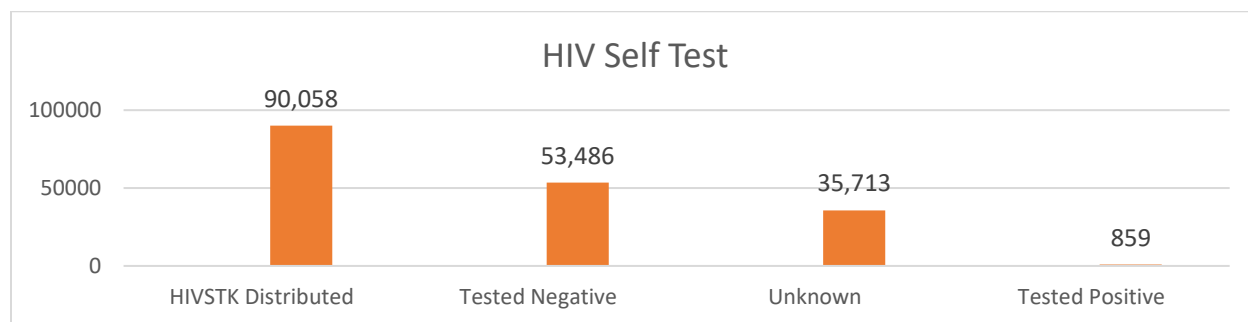
There are 12 messages of hope which are shown in the table below;

MESSAGE TYPE	MESSAGE NUMBER	MESSAGE
How Men Feel	1	Love yourself; love your family. Know your HIV status.
	2	Your life matters, live productively. ARVs are good for you.
Engaging Men	3	Take care of your family! Be open about your HIV status.
	4	Taking your ARVs religiously protects you and your loved ones
Men's Preference for Care	5	Men's fellowships are an appropriate forum for discussing health issues.
	6	A good man tests for HIV to protect himself and his family.
How Children and Youth Leaders Can Help	7	# Youth leaders standing strong and together for health
	8	Don't joke about HIV you might hurt a friend
How Mothers Can Help	9	Treatment is available free. It works for all my family members who tested HIV positive.
	10	I am a woman who cares for my family we all know our HIV status.
How Care Providers Feel	11	Our trained carers give hope through accompaniment and support structures.
	12	Consistent use of ARVs will enable you to live a productive and healthy life.

The Church Leaders were also trained on how to use the messages on the community level. Message of hope promoting HIV prevention have been spread to churches and communities through the use of media too. The Messages of hope and Jingles were broadcasted on the Voice of the Church radio show, Swazi TV, Channel S and EBIS. Lastly, the Faith Leaders assisted in the identification of members of their churches to serve as caregivers who were also trained on HIV 101.

HIV PREVENTION

All the activities in the cascade were taking place in churches with the implementing partners being assisted by the caregivers and church leaders. People showed enthusiasm about the use of the self-test kits. A total of 403 clients were referred for confirmatory test and 58 were linked to care. The clients are also offered other prevention services like; Prep, VMMC, Family planning and condoms. The table below shows the FCI cascade;



CHURCH LEADERS' TRAINING ON COVID-19

There was a Training of trainers on Covid-19 of 275 church members from all the 5 mother bodies. The church leaders were trained in collaboration with the Ministry of Health COAG and the Ministry of home affairs in addressing issues of Covid-19 concerning the Jericho Christian faith churches. Meetings were conducted with two groups of Jericho from Manganganeni and Macudvulwini. These church leaders declared that they will correspond to the Covid-19 regulations in their churches.

FAITH HEALING INDABA

In December 9, 2020 there was a Faith Healing Indaba which included the 5 church mother bodies, Inter faith community (Islamic faith, Bahai Faith, Nazareth Baptist church and other Faith based organizations like Acts of Faith, World vision Eswatini, Voice of the Church, NATICC, The Fortress, Bible Society, Scripture Union and Siphilile). The rationale for the Faith Healing Indaba (FHI) was to provide a platform for the Inter-Faith Community to deliberate on issues of faith healing regarding HIV/AIDS.

Lessons learnt during the indaba;

- *Most of the faith groups that attended the FHI are happy with FCI*
- *Most of them ascribe to messages that encourages HIV diagnosis, ART uptake and reduction of stigma & discrimination.*
- *Different opinions were observed under the HIV prevention category where most of the faith groups reported that they prohibit youth & adolescent from accessing prevention services*
- *Myths were reported among other faith groups*

To address the issues raised messages of hope were developed for Faith healing and given to church leaders.



Image: Participants during the Faith Healing Indaba and FCI Manager presenting

Prevention of Sexual Violence against Children (PSVAC)

Faith leaders from churches in the 4 regions were being trained on PSVAC so that they can provide child safeguarding services in their churches. Church congregants are also sensitized on PSVAC. Through the assistance of the implementing partners the church were provided with copies of Children's Welfare and Protection Act 2012, The sexual offences and domestic violence act 2018 and shelter guidelines for sexually violated children. Cases of gender based violence are reported by church leader or carers for investigation. Prevention of Sexual Gender Based Violence messages were developed and the distributed in the churches.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Conducting community meeting to sensitize people on children with special needs and disabilities raised awareness of community members
- Church leaders accept change or new information when they are involved at the planning stage which was seen during the review of the LSE manual for the out of school youth
- Increased knowledge on HIV through the FCI project among churches leaders leads to reduction of stigma and discrimination in the church and healthy congregants.

SUCSESSES

- Caregivers were trained on how to use the manual which has guided them as they stimulate children with special needs in the different NCPs.
- Community meetings have been conducted in 48 NCPs raising awareness for 1369 community members.
- The neighborhood care point database was updated thus strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the Church Forum ECD programme, making it easier to reach caregivers and to know which NCPs are functional or which NCPs needs to be revived.
- Savings and credit group continued operating and formation of 5 new groups
- The National LSE manual was reviewed to be user friendly for the youth in the church.
- Launch of the FCI project and the Recruitment of the Faith Community Initiative Programme Manager
- Establishment of the Church Forum Draft Strategic Plan 2020-2025

CHALLENGES

- During the first phase of the out break of Covid-19 it was difficult to go to the field to implement or monitor the project activities.
- Some savings groups' members had source of income to save money and pay outstanding loan due to the lockdown. Attendance in savings groups was poor.
- PrEP uptake and the other prevention services is low at church level.
- More people referred to care but fewer are confirmed to be linked
- Some faith leaders have to walk long distances to distribute HIVST kits
- During COVID-19, many church leaders and carers seem more reluctant to distribute HIVST kit

CONCLUSION

Through the different projects in the organization, the Church Forum will continue to provide knowledge and support churches with the aim to strengthen the churches in the fight against Covid-19, HIV/AIDS, Poverty, Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights, Prevention of Sexual violence against children and Gender Based Violence.