



# ESWATINI CHURCH FORUM NEWS

January, 2024 Issue, Volume 1

## WELCOME TO CHURCH FORUM NEWSLETTER FIRST EDITION



**ABOUT CHURCH FORUM**—The Eswatini Church Forum on HIV and AIDS was founded in 1999 by five church organisations in the kingdom of Eswatini: Eswatini Conference of Churches, Council of Swaziland Churches, The League of African and Independent Churches, The International Tabernacle, and the Eswatini Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Most of the churches in the country are affiliated with the first three organisations cited above. The last two are non-affiliates. All churches are free to join the organisation either through affiliation or directly. The purpose of the organisation is to coordinate HIV/AIDS implementation through the churches and Church Forum has been able to provide leadership to the churches through the implementation of numerous interventions in different churches.

While HIV/AIDS has been the entry point to the churches, Church Forum has implemented programmes for children, youth, women and men. Early childhood development services have been provided through Neighbourhood Care Points (NCP) programmes, which provide feeding, psychosocial support, early learning, and special needs services. The youth is provided with Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights services, women are provided with a Sexual Gender-Based Violence programme while men are reached through positive masculinities, which supports men to be part of their children's life and upbringing. Pastors are encouraged to coordinate these services through their churches and allow caregivers a platform to support the children. Through the Faith and Community initiative, Church Forum provides churches with messages of hope, HIV self-test kits and justice for children. They have radio programs that reach people in Swaziland and South Africa, they also support savings groups and child protection services.

**The vision** for Church Forum is that Church Forum on HIV and AIDS envisages an Eswatini that is free from HIV and AIDS, GBV, other health issues and where children and the youth achieve their full potential.

**The mission** is to collaborate with all stakeholders to coordinate health and wellness interventions among Faith Communities in Eswatini. Church forum's **core values** are Integrity, Transparency, Love, Care for all people, unity in the faith and Resilience.

## Getting Hold of Church Forum!



The Church forum on HIV & Aids offices are located on Stand Number 1653 Mbabala Street, Helemisi Township, Manzini, Eswatini. For more information you can call or contact the office on the following platforms:

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[www.eswatinchurchforum.org](http://www.eswatinchurchforum.org)

*“Bringing Wholeness & Hope to Every Person”*



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## CONSULTATIVE PROCESS MEETING



*Stakeholders who attended the meeting*

ALCON House Manzini, Eswatini, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Eswatini Church Forum on HIV and AIDS convened a half a day stakeholders' Consultative Process meeting at the ALCON House in Manzini, Eswatini on the 15th November 2023. Seventeen stakeholders attended the half a day meeting. The stakeholders included the following; Khulisa

Umntfwana, Eswatini National Youth Council, Voice of the Church, Men engage, Kwakha Indvodza (KI), Equip Us Eswatini, Council of Swaziland Churches, Umsimisi, Roman Catholic Church, Umhluma Eswatini, Swaziland Youth Empowerment organization (SYEO), Eswatini Church Forum, Royal Eswatini Police Service One Stop, Social Welfare Department and Independent consultants. Key issues emanated from the meeting. They include but not limited to; Capacity building for religious leaders in the area of trauma counselling and Men engagement programs.

### Objective

**The main objective of the consultative process meeting was to engage different stakeholders in conversation regarding the escalating gender based violence cases in the country and brainstorm of possible solutions to this social ill which has affected many people and in the process claimed lives.** Eswatini Church Forum radio emissions was used as a benchmark to trigger discussions around the issue of gender based violence. More collaborations are still to follow this engagement.

## Radio Emissions



*Youth in Studio during a youth radio program*

The Eswatini Church Forum on HIV and AIDS runs a live one-hour radio program with the Voice of the Church (VOC) between 9:00 am – 10:00 am every Tuesdays. The objective of the radio program is to send our correct and consistent HIV related messages to the listenership of the program. The program is designed to target Youth and adults. It also strategically targets addressing issues relating to the role of the church on HIV and AIDS, Gender Based Violence and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

Since its resumption, the program has aired 7 emissions with 75 responses, 60 were live calls, 5 short messages and 10 social media responses. It is worth noting that the program started off with the topic of Gender Based Violence since it was strategically positioned during the 16 days of activism against GBV. Another important fact to note was that during this period under review there was an escalation of reported gruesome killings of women and children. Responding to this pandemic of gender related atrocities was only natural to the program. Below is a summary of the response from the programs.

Church Forum has also linked up with other sister organizations to tackle these issues. Since CF does not have a counseling wing, most of the respondents who needed urgent attention were duly referred. Until the end of the year, the program had made 10 referrals to partners such as the Police One Stop Shop, Council of Swaziland Churches and SWAGAA among others. The reflections have shown that the problem of gender based violence is a far reaching one in the country. This poses a big challenge since it has some far reaching effects hence more programs to tackle this matter are still to come.

**Church Forum Participates In Capacity Strengthening Exercises** - There has been a number of capacity Strengthening exercises happening through Church Forum programming within the last quarter of the year. Even though it was already close the festive season, the organisation was successful in ensuring the implementation of the planned activities without fail. Some of the trainings included sensitizing religious leaders on the Human Papilloma Virus, Tracing drivers of HIV among adolescent girls and youth which was a youth working session as well as Development of a faith based document of Standard Operating Procedures to eliminate HIV related stigma and discrimination, sensitization of religious leaders on Non—communicable diseases. Below are summarized versions of the different workshops.

**Sensitizing religious leaders on the Human Papilloma Virus**—Religious leaders from mostly the Christian Churches representing the Mother bodies were organised from Hhohho and Shiselweni regions. Leaders from Manzini and Lubombo had already been sensitized. This meeting was attended by over 40 religious leaders and were given information on HPV in Eswatini. Topics covered during the engagement included but not limited to HPV pre-test, Cancers overview, HPV vaccines and risk communication. The leaders were given time to voice out their views and they raised the need to continuously support them as they disseminate this information in their churches. More information is still to be given to other leaders to bring more girls to vaccinate against HPV. The leaders received the sensitization with open arms.



*Pastors during their training in Manzini*

*“Bringing Wholeness & Hope to Every Person”*

## Tracing drivers of HIV among adolescent girls and youth



The organisation brought together youth from the different religious organisations to put together ideas in tracking drivers of HIV among adolescents and Youth. The 2 days training workshop, held in Manzini was a continuation towards the compilation of a compendium of Promising Practices. During the workshop young people shared their views on what they think were the current trends in the spread of the HIV virus among adolescent girls and youth and possible solutions to the challenges.

← Youth at the George Hotel during the meeting

## Saving Groups Concepts—Church Forum also runs both community and Church based savings groups.

The concept is to encourage vulnerable groups to get used to saving from the little they get from time to time to use in times of difficulty. Currently the organisation has 32 savings group with an average membership of 20 per group. They are scattered in all the four regions of the country in places like Mambane, Maphungwane and Mahlabaneni in the Lubombo region, Bethany, Lamgabhi, and Malkerns for the Manzini Region, Nkwalini, Nkhaba, Ndzingeni and Sidwashini for the Hhohho region and finally Hlatsi, Nyamane and Ka Gwebu for the Shiselweni region. These groups meet every month to conduct their activities which include savings and other social impact exercises like counselling each other. The minimum amount of savings is E20. A member can decide on the maximum. The members can also borrow the money and bring it back with an interest of not more than 10% of the loan. At the end of the year group members share the collected funds as per the regulations of the savings concept. The 32 groups have managed to save over E1 Million since 2022. (For more information Church Forum is willing to share ideas on the savings concept.)



Group sharing their savings at the end of year meeting

## Inception Meeting—Bread for the World (Brot)

The Eswatini Church Forum has secured funding from Bread for the World for a 3-years's project "Strengthening of Eswatini Churches in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS and Gender Based Violence". The project period is from the August 2023 - July 2026. As part of the implementation process Church Forum commissioned a consultancy that was led by Mr. Olaf Hirschman from Difam. The objective of the consultancy was to ensure the appropriate and professional implementation of the Project in the most effective manner possible by a thorough project planning process. In particular, to make every effort to ensure that the Project's objectives/outputs were achieved. The consultancy process took 5 days at the Church Forum offices in Manzini, and it went successful as the objectives and all the necessary details were covered. Detailed reports of this exercise are shared to all relevant stakeholders.

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Church Forum with Olaf from Difam during the meeting