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## A word from the Acting Executive Director

Dear reader,

Welcome to the Positive Faith in Action! INERELA+'s newsletter.

"Measurable results" has become the catch phrase of sustainable programmes and interventions. As part of our engagement with RAANGO, we are a member of the 50 by 15 movement, a movement striving to make sure we achieve development goal 6 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Reducing HIV incidence is crucial to reducing the burden of HIV both on the current and future generations. Results must be seen in communities, not just countries.

It has been just more than six months since our last newsletter came out, and it has been a particularly busy six months! One of the reasons for the delay is that our valued VSO volunteer, Carolyn Opinde was recalled to Kenya. We are grateful to Clare Mead who has taken on the responsibility of designing and co-ordinating the production of **Positive Faith in Action**. Valuable work has been done in terms of expanding INERELA+'s reach into communities. In this issue you will be able to read about this with particular reference to Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi and our Asia/Pacific region. We have also seen the positive impact on the network in relation to some particularly stretching partnerships; partnerships that have seen us grow not only in the breadth of our response to HIV but in the depth. Please have a closer look at the work we are able to do with both Save the Children and SWEAT.

It was with great delight that we saw one of our co-founders, Canon Gideon Byamugisha being honoured, this time with an honorary doctorate. This issue includes articles which will tell you about both some of the participation in the International AIDS Conference (IAC) which took place in July last year, and also the World AIDS Day. It is good to see how INERELA+'s participation at these events and occasions is growing significantly in its impact. The stories and successes of INERELA+ are however much more about the way in which we are able to impact on the lives of individuals, people living with faith, struggling to find understanding in relation to their HIV status. We are pleased to share with you in this issue a journey of faith by one of our Muslim members from Zambia.

As always, there are changes in an organization or network. It is with sadness for his loss, but gratitude for his contribution, that this issue carries a tribute to the late Sheikh Ali Banda.

We are entering a phase of growth which is very necessary for INERELA+, that of publishing material! In this issue we talk both about the book which we were able to launch in partnership with CUAHA, as well as the SAVE toolkit which is at long last taking shape. All these materials are also being posted on our website, so go and have a dig – there is much treasure!



Photo by: Clare Mead

**The Rev'd Fr. JP Mokgethi-Heath**

## Book Launch

**INERELA+ is proud to present *What's faith got to do with it?***

Over the last number of years responses from Faith Based Organizations and institutions have been ever more recognised when responding to HIV. The unique role which INERELA+ plays as a network of religious leaders living with HIV, and CUAHA as a network of denominations addressing HIV at grass root level have inspired the writing of articles from across the faith sector examining and challenging ever deeper responses to HIV from people of faith.

**Archbishop Emeritus, Desmond Tutu says :**

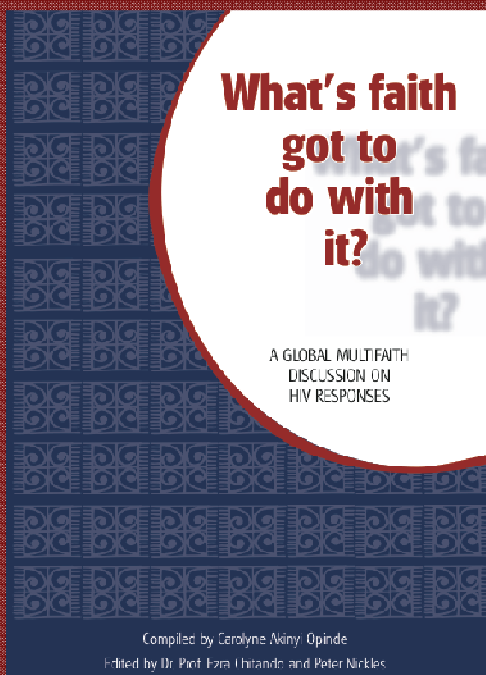
“This book is an inspiration to faith-based organisations who are living their faith in this world, and not just the next. Read it and your hopes will rise. God is responding to HIV and AIDS. I pray that all those who will read this book will be guided by the Holy Spirit to speak the truth in love and to pour balm on wounds - and that the stories in this book will bring hope and healing to a broken world.”

**Canon Gideon Byamugisha says:**

“Not only is this resource salvic, redemptional and liberational in facts, style and methodology; it is also multi-faith, multi-sectoral and multi-level -able to reach, speak to and benefit a variety of potential users at different levels and in different sectors with different dimensions of questions, challenges and insights.

This book is essential because time is not on our side. We have to succeed in this life and leadership task of overcoming the AIDS epidemic before the virus triumphantly and devastatingly celebrates its 50th anniversary”.

**Copies of the book & links to find the pdf are available from the INERELA+ website**



Compiled by Caroline Awiny Opiinde

Edited by Dr. Piet Ezra Uthando and Peter Ntshole



## INERELA+ remembers Sheikh Ali Charles Banda



I first met Sheikh Ali Charles Banda at a retreat in Siavonga in 2005. He was one of the facilitators. He facilitated on HIV and AIDS and it was during this retreat that INERELA+ Zambia was launched. During the sessions which he took, I learnt a lot from him. He was full of love and compassion towards all of us. He was sociable and approachable to every one on the retreat as though we had known him for a very long time. We interacted as one family and one couldn't tell that we were of different faiths. It was an interfaith retreat which attracted participants from the Christian, Muslim and Bahai' faiths and we were meeting for the first time.

Sheikh Ali was hard working, sober minded and he was of uncompromising integrity. He was a wise leader and when it came to issues of governance and implementation he emphasised the importance of handling public funds carefully and with full accountability. This helped provide a good foundation for our organisation to move into the future with an excellent chance of success. I am glad to have the opportunity of working with such a fine man, particularly in view of his strong principles and sound understanding of the community. INERELA+ Zambia is an interfaith organisation which was headed by a Muslim chairperson and Christian Vice chairperson and there was no tension between us. Neither did I hear anyone complain about him nor did we complain about each other for both of us and INERELA+ Zambia at large stands for one goal and that is an HIV and AIDS free nation.

We both had the same mission to eliminate stigma and discrimination among the religious leaders in Zambia. We worked at this noble task in harmony, as one family and not as different people from different faiths. We always stood for principles which brought us together and it is for this reason that I call Him **OUR LEADER** because he treated each and every one of us as an equal.

**Article & photo provided by: Fr Mark D. Musamu, Acting Chairperson INERELA+ Zambia**

## INERELA+ MALAWI ENGAGES INTO ADVOCACY ON THE DRAFT HIV AND AIDS LAW

Like many African countries, Malawi commissioned a special Law Commission in 2008 to come up with a law to address issues related to HIV and AIDS. The commissioners of this special Law Commission were drawn from a cross section of key players in the country. These included clergy, lawyers, networks of people living with HIV (PLHIV), academia and those from both the National AIDS Commission and the Principal Secretary in the Department of Nutrition and the HIV in the office of the President and Cabinet.

The report of the Commission contains some progressive proposals, which if implemented, will enhance Malawi's approach to the handling of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

However, as has been the trend in the region, the report has some controversial sections included in it. There are issues of criminalization, compulsory/mandatory testing for selected groups of people including sex workers, those entering into polygamous relationships, those intending to get into unformed services, domestic workers and cathedra practices as well as issues on disclosure of one's HIV status without consent amongst others.

**Controversial sections include...  
criminalization, compulsory/mandatory  
testing for selected groups of people...**

INERELA+ Malawi (MANERELA+), initially collaborated with other networks of PLHIV and with the support of Christian Aid, Norwegian Church Aid, Voluntary Service Overseas and Action Aid International Malawi, formed a civil society location that commissioned an analysis. The analysis was done by an American law Professor, Shima Baradaran, who has expertise in constitutional law (having taught at the University of Malawi). She was tasked to isolate issues for purposes of advocacy on the draft law.

INERELA+ Malawi has since made representations to the Vice President of Republic of Malawi, Joyce Banda, and the Legal affairs committee of parliament on the need to look critically at the controversial sections of the law.

Currently, the network has plans to present the issues to members of cabinet who are yet to discuss the report. Following the meeting it had with the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Professor Peter Mutharika MP,

the network and its coalition partners fear that if passed as it stands, the bill could seriously undermine the national response and Malawi would lose out on all its achievements, as people would not be willing to access services, thus driving the epidemic underground.

So far, the response has been positive but more needs to be done to realize the desired results. INERELA+ Malawi and its coalition partner's message have been loud and clear on this piece of draft legislation.

**Article & photo provided by:  
INERELA+ Malawi**



## Partnership with SWEAT

Almost two years ago INERELA+ entered into a partnership with the Ford Foundation, one which challenged us deeply as to of what we really meant in terms by our vision: *A World where HIV related stigma, transmissions and deaths are eliminated. Was this really for all people? Did we simply want to focus on people who we were comfortable with, or should we be looking at people everywhere who were affected by and vulnerable to the HIV.* Our work in Nigeria lead us to completely relook at the attitudes which may have been held about Sex Work, and Sex workers. Quite a few years ago I watched a BBC programme which I think was called "True or lie". In the programme people were challenged to answer embarrassing questions about their lives in front of close family and friends. The daughter of a pastor was asked the question, "Have you ever had sex for money?" With shame she answered "Yes". After this she said she could not continue with the show, but asked to explain herself, she explained to her horrified family and friends that she had remained in a loveless marriage simply to have the security of a roof over her and her children's' heads... **Continues page 5**

## Smiles from the land of Om

This is a story of change & smiles from the land of Om, the incredibly marvellous and breathtakingly beautiful land of Indus, a land of snake charmers and Rajas with divine attire. The positive aspects of the land are however fading away, being usurped by one of the fastest growing populations of people living with HIV globally. The majority of Indian society is alienated by the impact of the high HIV prevalence, which doubled within a short span of time, and continues to destroy the support system, the dignity of human life and the right to life.

The response mechanism, although halting and beginning to reverse the HIV infection, was not very effective on a large scale. This was due to the stigma, shame, denial and discrimination associated with HIV.

As the silence deepened, so the infection spread from the urban regions to the rural population of India, largely due to seasonal migrant labourers returning home after seeking greener pasture in the urban areas. Today, INERELA+ Asia/Pacific in collaboration with the Asia Interfaith Network of HIV and AIDS (AINA) India, from the land of Om, is responding to HIV from a faith perspective. The response though new, is loud and clear in its messaging which calls for elimination of HIV related stigma, infection and deaths.

INERELA+ Asia/Pacific is increasing in membership as men and women of the cloth, beyond cast, creed, and colour are uniting to create a stream of the HIV faith-based responses. From Delhi, the pulse hub of Indian democracy, to Bangalore the hub of Indian IT, INERELA+ Asia/Pacific, from its national network office based in Mumbai, is sending a call out to faith leaders, lay and ordained, men and women, living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS, to adopt a rights-based approach to HIV prevention. The network is penetrating strongly into faith communities through open dialogues and forums, in a bid to create a stigma free society. A multi-faith summit was held at Art of Living and sort to address issues relating to HIV. The essence of the declaration includes the removal of roadblocks, creation of a rights protected environment, reduction of stigma and discrimination and above all, moving on, empowered with knowledge and spirituality. Later all the summit members joined in affirming the 15 points of action, and professed their commitment and solidarity towards the movement.

Religious leaders came out with various ideas in support of people living with or affected by HIV; They joined the global movement started in The Netherlands in March 2010 and signed to make personal commitments to take the cause forward through religious discourse, visiting PLHIV in their area, linking up and working with service providers for the upliftment of PLHIV.

**Written by: Mr Baiju Joseph**

## New appointments

We are delighted to be able to announce that since the last newsletter a Regional Reference Group meeting was held for the Asia/Pacific Region. At this meeting Dr Erlinda Senturias was elected the Asia/Pacific region's representative to the INERELA+ Board.

Mr. Pablo Garcia has been appointed as the Consultant/Facilitator for the America's region. His primary focus of mobilizing recourses will be aided by his own experience of working with a donor agency. Mr. Garcia's interaction with the faith community, while with NCA in the Americas also gives a strong foundation to the further expansion of our reach and influence within the Americas.

As of the beginning of this year we have been joined in the secretariat by Mrs Nomah Zibengwa. She joins us as a bookkeeper to enhance the finance department in INERELA+. Her international experience will serve our network well.

Mrs Mercy Bih Tafuh, who has now been working with us for 18 months, has been promoted to Finance and Administration Manager. Her work in strengthening the financial systems of the network have been well attested to by the successful audits we have undergone while she has worked with us. Mercy goes on maternity leave towards the end of March. These appointments all point to a general and focused increase in the capacity of our network, ever working towards a more effective and accountable response to HIV across the world.

**Since April, INERELA+ Asia Pacific with AINA India has been able to reach out to more than 350 leaders and 400 delegates.**

**As I reflect on the INERELA+ Asia/Pacific, I remember the call to the nation by a great visionary called Ravindranatha Tagore and it goes like this:**

### **My Country Awake.**

Where the mind is without fear and the head held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards  
perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into  
the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening  
thought and action;  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,  
let my country awake.

## World AIDS Day Events

Written by: JP Mokgethi-Heath

INERELA+ has had a particularly active World AIDS Day (WAD). Members of the secretariat as well as members of the INERELA+ South Africa travelled to Cape Town to launch the joint INERELA+ and CUAHA publication, "What's Faith Got to do with it? – a global multi-faith discussion on HIV responses". Amongst the eminent participants in the Cathedral Church of St. George the Martyr – Cape Town, was Dr. M. Mugabe, country director of UNAIDS in South Africa, who was the key note speaker. Later the same day INERELA+ participated in the diocese of Capetown's observance of World AIDS Day in the same cathedral.

In Rwanda an Interfaith Prayer Day for AIDS was held at Musenyi, in the District of Bugesera, Eastern Province. This was their first experience of what is known as a Solidarity Enhancement Day of Petition and Prayer (SEDOPP). Members of INERELA+ Rwanda (RWANERELA+) had an opportunity to share their experiences. The event was held together with the National Control Commission celebration of WAD and VCT was available.

In Sierra Leone there was a build up to WAD with an HIV Friendly Friday, HIV Friendly Sunday and a Radio programme to sensitize the public about the SAVE message.

In Kenya, INERELA+ Kenya joined the National AIDS Control Contingent in a procession through Nairobi with their banners and posters. They had a stand displaying materials and distributing the same at a national forum in Nairobi.

Two of the INERELA+ Kenya members gave talks during the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) General Assembly meeting and were interviewed by media. Members in Mombasa joined the District AIDS control officials during a district meeting and had a chance to talk about the role of the faith leaders in addressing HIV related issues.

Furthermore on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> December two meetings were held, one in Nairobi and one in Machakos; both targeting women. The aim was to sensitize the women as to how important it was for them to be aware of their HIV status – and to be aware of the Gender Based Violence amongst their congregations (and society at large), and to understand their role as women clergy in relation to these factors.

In Kisumu, members were involved in reaching out to children living with or affected by HIV. They participated in a procession on "No Divine Healing for the HIV+ persons, we need ARV's". In Nairobi, an open air crusade was held in two slums by members on 'Divine Healing' issues.

**...Continued from page 3** In one community in Nigeria we found that all the women doing sex work were widows from that community – many not yet thirty. Community and cultural conditions had led to a vulnerability which in turn forced these women into sex work in order to survive. Further exclusion from the faith communities then meant that not only did their sex work expose them to HIV, but exclusion from the faith community meant that there was no access to prevention messages, prevention methods, or the faith related support which could reduce risk and vulnerability.

Our lessons learned are as nothing compared to the massive engagement and corpus of information and understanding which a group like SWEAT (Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce) has. Their positive engagement with sex workers has given them massive insight to the hypocritical way many people relate to sex workers. It has also exposed the additional vulnerabilities sex workers have in various areas, and how legislation most frequently exacerbates vulnerability rather than reduces it.

A working relationship with SWEAT is capacitating INERELA+ to respond to needs on the ground from a more informed perspective, and assisting us in affirming the intrinsic dignity of every person created in the image of God. We look forward to a time when stigma and discrimination in all their forms and manifestations can be removed, and additional vulnerabilities to HIV alleviated – a time when *HIV related stigma, transmissions and deaths are eliminated!*

Written by: JP Mokgethi-Heath

Photo: Clare Mead



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Help Line (24 hours): 0800 60 60 60

## International AIDS Conference (IAC) Vienna, 2010

Prior to the IAC I had an opportunity to travel to London to showcase some of the work INERELA+ Sierra Leone is doing and then traveled to Vienna to attend the Pre-Faith Conference, which took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

The XVIII International AIDS Conference (IAC) -2010, with the theme: Rights Here, Right Now, took place as planned in Vienna, Austria, from July 18-23 2010. Participants in the conference were drawn globally from people and organizations involved and influential in the areas of HIV; Gender, and Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights, and included the input of policy makers aimed at attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's); including universal access to treatment and prevention scale-up; care and support for people living with the HIV and AIDS, etc.

Many other contextual social issues such as injecting drug use; bisexual and transgender practices were linked with HIV transmission and infection, from evidence-based research/studies many of who's reports were discussed during the majority of the conference plenary and concurrent sessions, as well as in many of the workshops/sessions at the Networking Zones in the Global Village.

Funding barriers were toppled, key gaps and challenges were highlighted in almost all of the conference sessions aimed at achieving universal access to treatment and prevention scale-up for HIV.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010 at 12:30pm., I made a presentation on the topic: ... [continues page 9](#)

Photo by:  
JP Mokgethi-Heath

IAC Faith community march through the streets of Vienna



Coming up:  
**XIX international AIDS Conference**  
July 2012 Washington, DC USA  
More info: [www.aids2012.org](http://www.aids2012.org)

## United we stand...

People living positively in different congregational support groups in the country have commended INERELA+ Malawi (MANERELA+) for the efforts being made to make sure that they are living a purpose driven life and involve themselves in different activities at community and household level.

Mr. Phopiwa, Committee Member for *Mathambi Madalitso Support Group* in Mulanje, said that projects by INERELA+ Malawi are encouraging a lot of people to open up and collaborate with others in society, notwithstanding their HIV status. According to him, the establishment of congregational support groups is helping to curb the stigma and discrimination that used to be shown and expressed whenever people disclosed their HIV status as positive, since they were taken as promiscuous and sick, and not capable of doing anything.

"INERELA+ Malawi is doing a lot in ensuring that we gather together and share our issues and experiences, and encourage one another on the importance of taking medication. It is also helping in advocating for availability of Bacterium and other important medication at our hospital." Said Phopiwa. Phopiwa and others expressed their gratitude for the funds that have always been given to the groups, for them to start-up businesses and establish a village account that will help in replenishing their households with foodstuffs and to fall back on when they get sick.

Kwatukumbuchire Congregational Group of Machinga is another group benefiting from this project. Recently they have produced about 20, 000 fired, and another 5000 unfired bricks for the construction of a multi-purpose centre that will also serve as a community based child care centre...

[Continues page 12](#)

### Calling for in 2011:

- **African Governments to be accountable for the 15% Health allocation from GDP**
- **Governments to work with Civil Society to achieve 50 by 15**
- **Governments to examine & remove all legislation which stigmatizes or discriminates against people & increases vulnerability to HIV**

## I am Positive, Female & honorable Muslim

A Muslim woman has so many challenges, just like any other woman, maybe even more that the average woman faces. This is my story. My name is Jamilla Rodah Katambo and I went for HIV testing in 2005. The results were shocking to me, as I was found to be HIV positive. The first problem to come to my mind was, how do I share my HIV status with my family, as a single mother and the community at large?

There was still too much stigma and discrimination in the communities and I made a personal commitment to myself to remain strong.

So I decided to disclose my status to my family members first, as I was and still am the head of my house after losing my beloved husband in a road accident in 1991. To my relief, my immediate family and closest friends accepted my status and supported me mentally and spiritually. This was a great help and boost to me and my troubled mind. When I speak with my friends about HIV, they always say that there are a lot of diseases afflicting people in our community, so why should we discriminate against HIV? That helped me a lot to raise my self esteem.

But there was a different and very difficult perspective in my religious life. There is a lot of denial and silence on HIV in most Muslim circles and I was seeing my Muslim sisters dying from HIV and denial and failing to speak out on their status because of the fear that their husbands would reject them.

In Muslim circles women cannot speak about sexuality and condom use openly, as this is regarded as a taboo. However, there are a lot of challenges facing the Muslim woman living with HIV and this made me to decide that I should declare my status openly to break the silence on HIV and encourage other Muslim women to feel free to test for HIV.

With much capacity building trainings from INERELA+ Zambia (ZANERELA+) Zambian Interfaith Networking Group on HIV and AIDS (ZINGO), NGO CC, I got the courage to openly come out of the closet as the first Muslim woman to openly declare her status in Zambia. I did this so that I could encourage my Muslim sisters to realize that they needed to be more affirmative. However, not everyone in the Muslim community has received my declaration favorably; in fact, some have been calling for my exclusion from all activities in my Muslim community. This has not discouraged me.

To date, I have been living positively for the past 5 years and I am actively involved with my friends in running a

community based organization that looks after the girl child orphans and educating them.

When I initially tested for HIV my CD 4 cell count was 420 but now, 5 years on, it is stabilizing at 901, and am not yet on medication. I have faith in Allah Almighty and this has strengthened me. I now believe that Allah has a purpose for me, despite my condition, and I only wish to serve others so that this silence on HIV is entirely broken in the Muslim communities. If you are not infected you are affected, even in Muslim circles.

**Written by: Jamilla Rodah Katambo**

**(share your story, email [clare\\_mead@inerela.org](mailto:clare_mead@inerela.org))**



**World AIDS Day  
Sierra Leone**

**Photo by: Pastor Albert Freeman**



**INERELA+ staff & Board member Pastor Mphiri Kamanga prepare for the book launch of 'What's faith go to do with it?' At St Georges Cathedral, Cape Town December 1st 2010**

**Photo by: Clare Mead**

## SAVE toolkit development

For years INERELA+ has been further developing, teaching and implementing the SAVE (Safer Practices; Available medicine and nutrition; Voluntary and confidential regular testing and counseling; Empowerment) prevention strategy. We have, however, identified the lack of a complete and usable Toolkit as a major shortfall. In the partnership we have within the Global Working Group to challenge SSDDIM and promote SAVE (GWG), we agreed that urgent work needed to be done to develop a comprehensive anti SSDDIM pro SAVE toolkit. Thanks to funding from DFID and WACC, we have been able to partner with Christian AID in developing a toolkit.

At this stage we have defined format, developed a table of contents, written much of the material and got initial feedback from GWG members, Christian AID staff and HIV practitioners. We hope to launch the training manual/toolkit within this year. All prayer and contributions welcome!

Written by: **JP Mokgethi-Heath**

## Out of the ashes rises a beautiful bird

Written by:  
**JP Mokgethi-Heath**

Two years ago the world looked on in horror as post election violence erupted in Kenya. Families and communities were ripped apart as tribal divisions manifested themselves. The pain of hatred and hurt which emerged seems to have given the nation as a whole the will to say; "Things must change!" A new Constitution was first drafted and has now been adopted, a Constitution which protects the rights of individuals. This Constitution states; "There may be no discrimination on the grounds of Gender or Race or any other grounds". Most religious leaders resisted – the people of Kenya supported!

While Kenya is the economic power house of East Africa, there is no question that millions within this country still struggle to make ends meet. Kebira remains one of the largest slums, or informal settlements in the world, and this is by no means the only place in Kenya you find people living in poverty. While a growing number of



Kenyans are prospering through the trade and business which improved

infrastructure are bringing, the vast majority eek out an existence well below the poverty line. Bold steps from the Government have given all Kenyans access to free primary education,

The pain of hatred and hurt which emerged seems to have given the nation as a whole the will to say;  
"Things must change!"

this has meant too few schools burdened with too many pupils and a desperate shortage of well educated and also well paid teachers.

Lack of Civil liberties, economic disparity and a lack of access to good education are all issues which have the dramatic effect of intensifying vulnerability to the HIV and ultimately to AIDS. It is within this environment which INERELA+ Kenya has boldly taken steps to make a measurable difference in all three, thereby creating pockets of difference and loving responses from faith communities.

While in Kenya I was able to visit four of these projects. Two focused strongly on the additional vulnerability to the HIV of the girl child, and two with a stronger focus on addressing additional vulnerabilities of Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. The work supported by INERELA+ Kenya through the Ford Foundation has seen great growth in understanding, skill and non judgemental engagement from both INERELA+ Kenya and its members through whom it these pilot projects are being implemented.

Only an hour's drive outside Nairobi, laid out on a beautiful campus overlooking the wonder of nature lies the main campus for the Christian University, Daystar. While the University provides outstanding education, blindness to the social needs around them leaves them a ticking time bomb. The University is served by many hundreds of teaching and service staff. A village has grown around the university to accommodate these people and their families, but no school exists for the children. As a result children have to travel many kilometres first to the main Nairobi/Mombasa road, and then a further distance along the road to their school. Many of the children, tired by the time they get to the Mombasa road hitch lifts with truck drivers putting themselves at risk of unsafe and unwanted sexual activity. In addition church and student groups trying to tackle the HIV on the campus are not permitted to speak about or make condoms available to students.

Supported by INERELA+ Kenya, a small group comprised of the local Anglican priest and students round him, are working bravely to raise awareness with the University of the vulnerability they are sanctioning in regards to the HIV, and find ways of mitigating it. **Continues page 10**

"There may be no discrimination on the grounds of Gender or Race or any other grounds".

## Save the Children

I always thought SAVE the Children was an organization specifically and narrowly focused on children. Of course this is right, but the “narrow” was my own imposition. How do SAVE the Children and INERELA+ interface though? Their strong focus on Sexuality and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) have become the open engagement and interface between our organizations.

In 2009 we started work on ‘Sex, Sexuality and Gender’ as a means of expanding our engagement with HIV. Faith communities have traditionally struggled with these topics. This has been one of the stumbling block of getting faith communities to engage more holistically with HIV, focusing on giving youth and adults alike the necessary prevention messages which address their specific vulnerabilities at their life stage.

While recognizing the need to equip both our own members and faith communities as a whole in being able to teach on SSG, we lacked the skills to do so competently. This is, however, the joy of partnership, Save the Children had developed fantastic material on taking people through basic sensitization, right through to master trainers on this topic.

An intensive program of training was initiated, and by the end of last year three people had been put through the first two levels of training, and various others had gone through the first level. Members were identified from the three countries of primary implementation (Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia) and the training and implementation were expanded to their congregations. It is an absolute joy to see religious leaders, both lay and ordained approach these trainings with trepidation, and emerge feeling empowered and enthusiastic to go and empower their congregations.

This year the programme will be rolled out to an additional six congregations. Our partnership is now bearing real fruit for people on the ground, both rural and urban, as HIV prevention



Maputo, Mozambique training Dec 2010  
photo by: Clare Mead

and stigma eradication can be approached incorporating SRHR and SAVE approaches. Our growth in understanding will lead to faith community growth in dealing with issues which till now have been taboo.

Written by: JP  
Mokgethi-Heath

....Continued from page 6 Religious Leaders Crusading against HIV Stigma in Sierra Leone. Several questions were asked by various people on the strategies we use to do this. I took time to carefully explain to them about **HIV Friendly Friday and Sunday** we conduct for both of the main faiths in Sierra Leone, which is one of the ways we are drastically reducing stigma and discrimination both domestically and nationally.

Production of INERELA+ SL IEC material and booklets is aiding these HIV friendly activities thus encouraging faith communities to see people living with HIV as God’s creation and that stigmatizing them because of their HIV status is sinful.

What I liked most was the Multi Faith Pre Conference where religious leaders made a commitment to reduce stigma in their respective denominations.

The efficiently networked systems and architecture of the conference building combined to make the discussions and outcomes of the various sessions available to everyone. To me, that signified international support and commitment towards a global response to the HIV.



Written by & photo provided by:  
Pastor Freeman INERELA+ SL

## Carolyn Opinde and VSO

The INERELA+ Secretariat has by en large always operated with a capacity well below its responsibilities within the Network. It was therefore with great delight that we entered into an agreement with VSO RAISA in 2009. When asked what our needs were, we focused first and foremost on programmes. We were indeed delighted when VSO identified Carolyn Opinde as a fit in terms of our needs. Carolyn fitted very well into INERELA+, bringing both her own personal faith and understanding of the all embracing love of God, as well as considerable skills both in terms of programme development as well as programme implementation and reporting. Her skills in both monitoring and evaluation assisted INERELA+ to start moving in a direction of more effectively measuring impact and efficacy of certain interventions. We would like to express our sincere thanks to Carolyn for massive positive impact which she brought to the secretariat and network as a whole.

Written by: JP Mokgethi-Heath

**...Continued from page 8** Further to the west, nestling on the shores of Lake Victoria lies the bustling city of Kisumu. As is the case in many towns in rural areas, attitudes can be very conservative. Kisumu is however no ordinary rural town. Strongly supported by the local Anglican bishop a group of clergy and laity have started awareness- raising and discussion groups related to sexuality and sexual orientation. Long seen as a taboo this dynamic group now raises awareness in schools and faith communities. As a result the current group of more than 700 LGBTI people (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) people belonging to support groups in Kisumu are not only receiving services related to the HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, but many LGBTI people who were previously too stigmatised ( let alone traumatised ) to even discuss or face their sexuality are coming forward and, thus reducing their own and their loved one's vulnerability to the HIV .

This brave work supported by INERELA+ Kenya and Other Sheep is both ground breaking and extremely important as it shows how faith communities can move away from their prejudice and move to respond with God's love to all God's people. For some years INERELA+ Kenya has worked with a Seventh Day Adventist group in Nairobi. Currently, their support is aimed at reducing the vulnerability of the many young women in that impoverished area. The approach is unique, and holistic in the extreme. The bold work in which INERELA+ Kenya is engaged does not meet universal acceptance. It is challenging stereotypes and social constructs which have placed people in additional vulnerability to the HIV. Its progress is making a meaningful impact in this nation, newly emerged from division, seeking to find ways of creating a bold new accepting environment and nation for all.

## **“Unto Us a Child is Born”- The Launch of INERELA+ Ghana**

**“As we continue to look at each other, we begin to lose our differences and that which make us similar begin to bind us in one fellowship; irrespective of sexuality, ethnicity, racial divide and religious differences. These similarities are what we celebrate and from it we form our identity”.**

An African proverb, which is fundamental to the launch of the 19<sup>th</sup> INERELA+ African Region Country Chapter and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter in West Africa in East Legon – Accra, Ghana.

Excellent representation from the INERELA+ Secretariat, South Africa, INERELA+ Regional Reference Group Reps., Director General of Ghana AIDS Commission, Chaplain from the Ghana Customs & Health Programs, Apostolic Mission Intl, diverse representatives from religious congregations, Support Group Members & Media Houses, lit up the O.I.C Conference Hall- venue of the inauguration.

The launch was heralded by an early morning appearance on a National TV network program on GTV [English & Native Versions], where discussions on the significance of the INERELA+ network contributions to the global HIV response- Advocacy Actions; the role of the religious leaders in challenging stigma and discrimination within their congregations; and the need to challenge legal institutions to provide facilities for treatment care and support services for PLHIV and marginalized groups to reduce their vulnerability to HIV. Rev. Fr. Jape Mokgethi-Heath, in his expository teaching on “INERELA+- Who We Are”, provided participants with an insight on the Networks' efforts through its strategic capacity forum in engaging and empowering religious leaders from diverse beliefs with knowledge and skills to transform “negative” religious attitudes, build ‘heralds of hope/life changers’, initiate broad advocacy actions to challenge existing religious beliefs or community values that drive stigma and discrimination against PLHIV, and provide interventions to support spiritual and secular lives of PLHIV and other marginalized groups.

Reiterating the thoughts of Rev. Jape, Mrs. Angela – DG of Ghana AIDS Commission, said “faith groups have not been mobilized enough to contribute to the national response in Ghana.....Therefore, we need to take advantage of the capacity building opportunities created by INERELA+ to develop a holistic approach to empower both the infected and affected; and use the SAVE model as a comprehensive model to have a ‘whole’ prevention package”.

While ushering in the steering executive of the Ghana Network [Pastor James Ackon, Mrs. Mercy Acquah-Hayford, Rev Alexius Appiah, Margaret Owoo & Pastor Mensah Edward] for prayers, Rev. Latey remarked that “from today INERELA+ will be the base of knowledge and reference point to stir up faith communities in Ghana to action”. The uniqueness of this inaugural meeting lies in the fact that it signals the first time in Ghana that community leaders have been brought together to face the realities of HIV as a health condition; and starting to create a network to contribute and engage in the national response. The network being a platform for engaging religious leaders in Ghana to break the silence on discussing HIV, sexual & reproductive health rights within their congregations.

**Written by: Obele Oluchukwu  
[RRG Program Officer]**

*“faith groups have not been mobilized enough to contribute to the national response in Ghana.....Therefore, we need to take advantage of the capacity building opportunities created by INERELA+ to develop a holistic approach to empower both the infected and affected; and use the SAVE model as a comprehensive model to have a ‘whole’ prevention package”.*

## The Network's first Honourary Doctorate

I first encountered Canon Gideon Byamugisha in August of 2001, during the All African Anglican Consultation on the HIV and AIDS. When first he spoke of not only being an Anglican priest, but of being HIV+ I for the first time knew I was not alone. In the days that followed we spoke together, and shared dreams together. Experiencing Canon Gideon at full steam, teaching about HIV and challenging stigma, is something unique, sufficiently unique to inspire "Strategies of Hope" to be published, with a DVD, dedicated to his teaching; "What can I do".

By the time we held the launch retreat of ANERELA+, Gideon had already penned several books, all locally published, for the church in Uganda. These dealt with various aspects of the HIV without which congregants would simply have no access to. His unique insight into HIV from a faith perspective was recognised very early and he was invited to sit on the Ecumenical Advocacy HIV Strategy Group. The diocese recognised the work which Canon Gideon was doing in relation to HIV, and he was made an honorary Canon, both of St. Paul's Cathedral Namarembe in Uganda, as well as Holy Cross Cathedral in Lusaka, Zambia.

While he has received many honours and awards, including the 26<sup>th</sup> Niwano Peace Prize, it was not until now that his extraordinary contribution to the academic dialogue on HIV, particularly as an intersection with faith has been recognised. On 8<sup>th</sup> October 2010 the University of Botswana bestowed an honorary Doctorate of Divinity on Canon Gideon, recognition not only for the many books he has written, edited or contributed to, but also for the unique way he has been able to integrate his own life experience into good and relevant theology.

Now titled The Rev'd Dr., Canon Gideon Byamugisha he continues his remarkable work, never tiring of looking for new ways of helping people to understand, new analogies to unlock the fear which drives stigma, and new strategies to drive community involvement in challenging SSDDIM (Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction and Misaction) while promoting holistic HIV related prevention in the form of SAVE (Safer practices, Available Medical Interventions, VCT and Empowerment). INERELA+ has a right to be proud of Canon Gideon as one of its founders, and a duty to pray that his work will continue to inspire and challenge for many years to come.



**Written & photos by:**  
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## Bishop Zebedee Masereka

On the 4th February, 2011 Bishop Zebedee Kahangwa-Masereka resigned his position as chairperson of the INERELA+ Board. Bishop Zebedee, as many of us knew him, has been a face which many of us have been familiar with since early on in the development of ANERELA+. While the network was already founded in 2002, Bishop Zebedee joined the network in 2004. Elected as the Chairperson of INERELA+ Uganda (UNERELA+) in 2004, he brought his considerable personal experience in challenging HIV.



**Bishop Zebedee  
Masereka**  
Photo by:  
**JP Mokgethi-Heath**

Bishop Zebedee had retired as Diocesan Bishop of South Rwenzori (Kasese District of Uganda) in July 2003. Prior to this he had founded the Bishop Masereka Christian Foundation (2002), and later the Bishop Masereka Medical Centre (2005). The centre's strong emphasis of helping children whose lives had been impacted by HIV and AIDS was developed from Bishop Zebedee's own passion to address HIV in this part of Uganda which at the time had an HIV prevalence of 15 percent.

Bishop Zebedee came to the INERELA+ Board in 2006 as the representative for East Africa. When Canon Gideon, the founding Chairperson, resigned from the INERELA+ Board in 2007, Rev Christo Greyling, who had served as vice chairperson with Canon Gideon, became the Chairperson, and Bishop Zebedee was elected to serve as the vice chairperson of the Board. In 2009 Rev Christo Greyling was moving to Netherlands, and consequently resigned from the INERELA+ Board. At this time Bishop Zebedee was elected by the Board to serve as their chairperson. He lead INERELA+ through the process of finding an Executive Director in the person of Mr Chabu Kangale, and the expansion of its focus both to more fully establish regions outside of Africa, and also to start addressing issues of vulnerability to HIV in LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) people as well as with sex workers and girl children in particular.

INERELA+ is grateful for the time, expertise and experience which Bishop Zebedee brought to our network, and we wish him well as he continues to focus his time and effort more fully in the Bishop Masereka Christian Foundation and the Bishop Masereka Medical Centre.

**Written by: JP Mokgethi-Heath**

...Continued from page 6 Among other activities, the support groups are now involved in conducting awareness campaigns in different churches on the HIV and AIDS, and mutual faithfulness; encouraging people to go for VCT, and encouraging one another on the importance of positive living, and shunning unprotected sex to avoid re-infection from a different strain of virus.

However, the support groups face problems resulting in them failing to sustain their village savings and loan projects. According to group members, this is due to poverty and personal tribulations they sometimes go through, and lack of proper food stuffs for their households. As a result, they end up using their business capital, and fail to pay back the loan. This is a demotivating factor to other group members.



**Board Member  
Pastor Mphiri Kamanga**  
Photo by:  
**JP Mokgethi-Heath**

**Article provided by:  
INERELA+ Malawi**

All in all there have been some gains and some losses, as is so often the case when trying to change the tide of human struggle and misfortune. The people who are involved in this very worthwhile project are to be congratulated for the amount of time and effort they have put in. Victory is not complete – but then neither is defeat. We learn from our mistakes and are encouraged by our successes.

**INERELA+** would like to thank all who submitted stories, reports and photos for the newsletter. Your participation and hard work is valued & encouraged to ensure future issues packed with good & relevant stories & information.

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