Opportunities and challenges: the intersection of faith and human rights of LGBTI persons, 7-8 September 2016, UK.

Reverend Phumzile Mabizela continued with advocacy work by attending a human rights dialogue in the United Kingdom. The dialogue focused on ways in which to promote greater understanding of and tolerance for sexual minorities in the context of faith and the interface between LGBTI rights defenders, Religious Leaders and the LGBTI people of faith, recognizing that they are naturally exclusive. The dialogue brought together 60 people including faith communities, LGBTI and human rights advocates, selected governments, international institutions and regional organisations. The aim of the dialogue was to strengthen international focus and collaboration on the promotion of human and civil rights of the LGBTI persons as well as to further develop networks in support of advocacy groups with a view to future joint working.

SAVE Training for Theology students: University of KwaZulu Natal (28-30 September 2016).

As part of its annual practice, University of KwaZulu Natal invited INERELA+ to facilitate a SAVE training for theology students and lecturers. A total of 20 participants were in attendance. The training is part of the CHART initiative founded in 2007 as a collaborative space for research, reflection and engagement in the School of Religion and Theology (SoRaT) which seeks to coordinate current HIV and AIDS research in the school and promote new ways of engaging with the pandemic from a religious and theological perspective. This SAVE training is conducted on annual basis and it aims at producing a crop of graduates who will be able to cascade the SAVE to their communities for the eradication of stigma and discrimination. The training yielded a positive outcome and the lecturers proposed to integrate the SAVE methodology into their curriculum. Before the training Chart had organized a seminar where Reverend Phumzile's documentary was used to facilitate dialogue on HIV and sexuality.

Update from Country Networks

INERELA+ Nigeria has achieved a lot since 2012 which include adoption of SAVE model into Nigeria Strategic Plan, advocacy work and trainings with the financial support of Christian Aid. In the year 2016, INERELA+ Nigeria (NINERELA+) finished a 6 months project in River State titled, “Scaling up Prevention for most at risk women and girls in Nigeria” during which 12 female Religious Leaders from 6 congregations in Oyigbo Local Government area of River State were trained with the hope that they will cascade it to their respective communities to increase the uptake of HIV Counselling and Testing. With the financial assistance of Management Sciences for Health, NINERELA+ in 2014-2015 carried out an in-school-youth prevention program. NINERELA+ is now facing a possibility of financial crisis as the sole funder Christian Aid is ceasing its support this December.
INERELA+ Malawi, MANERELA+, embarked on a campaign to encourage people to stick religiously to their ARV medication as there is a growing tendency by some clerics, pastors and bishops deceiving people that prayers and not ARVs are a cure to AIDS related illnesses. In an article of the Sunday Times Newspaper of September 18 2016 titled, "Forcing people to stop taking ARVs is wrong", MANERELA+ Executive Director Denis Mseu uttered these words, “Discouraging people from taking ARVs has a negative impact on the adherence to treatment, because after people stop taking drugs, the viral load kicks up and that impedes the immunity, eventually causing death in many instances.”

MANERELA+ is urging churches to integrate gospel with HIV and AIDS messages in a bid to fight the pandemic by including key populations. Harold Kachepatsonga (MANERELA+ Programme Officer) expressed these sentiments, “It is high time Religious Leaders should stop perceiving sexual minority groups as the most sinful people on earth. Instead of involving them in church or mosque programmes, these people are condemned or judged as sinners.” MANERELA+ is implementing an HIV and AIDS project with the financial support from AIDS Right Alliance of Southern Africa (Arasa).

INERELA+ is shocked to hear of the sudden death of a board member, Sister Stella Canrach. Prior to her untimely death, UNERELA+ held a meeting on the 15th of October 2016 with Religious Leaders and representatives of the army from the military headquarters of Bombo, Uganda. This was part of the call to include most at risk populations like uniformed forces to integrate HIV and AIDS into their curriculum and encourage them to get tested. Sadly, this was the last meeting for Sister Stella Canrach (standing between a woman with a handbag and the one with an amber shawl). As a pioneer Board Member of UNERELA+, she passed on after the meeting.

She was battling cancer for a long time. INERELA+ wishes to express its sincere condolences to her loved ones and community. She will be solely missed for her commitment in serving those afflicted but again remembered for her selfless work. It was at the same meeting that the LGBTI report was presented and an alarm was raised thereafter for UNERELA+ to adopt an inclusive stance by integrating LGBTI work in their activities for the accessibility of treatment and care to key populations at the community level.

The story of INERELA+ Madagascar is unique as it demonstrates a typical example to other Networks that they should not be driven by monetary concerns but have a keen sense of social responsibility in the societies where they operate. This shows that with or without money a network can still be recognized because of its selfless work. INERELA+ Madagascar (commonly referred to as OMASAVE) bailed a stranger from the jaws of death after he was shunned by relatives due his HIV status. He was taken to hospital but social workers at the hospital insisted that for the man to get assistance they need to see his relatives first.
The relatives, however, never showed up and this forced him to vacate the hospital due to ill-treatment. OMASAVE played a very crucial role by providing free HIV counselling to the man and encouraging him to stay on medication. Unfortunately, the man died and OMASAVE sent a representative to attend the burial service.

SANERELA+ Implementing HCT Campaign in Ekurhuleni and Soweto

The Gauteng Department of Health has funded Gauteng Provincial PLHIV Sector for coordination and support activities of the PLHIV from April 2016 to March 2017. The member organisations that constitute the Gauteng Provincial PLHIV sector are: National Association of People Living with HIV & AIDS, Treatment Action Campaign, Positive Women’s Network and SANERELA+.

NAPWA is the leading organization and is responsible for the management of funds as well as providing monitoring support to the implementing organisations. The objective of the grant is to support AIDS Council and Gauteng Department of Health activities. SANERELA+ has been allocated a portion of the funding to implement HCT campaigns and TB co-infection campaigns in Ekurhuleni and Soweto during the last week of October. However, despite carrying out a number of campaigns, when it comes to actual testing people are unwilling to get tested.

Unfortunately the timing of the campaign was also amiss as it was held for school pupils during matric examination time. The students claimed that getting tested during exam time can be disastrous especially because a positive result will undoubtedly cause extreme stress leading to possible failing of the examination.
Pastor Machimane of The Apostolic Faith Mission Church carried out a Health Talk Show on the 13th of November in Burgersdorp. 78 people were in attendance (21 males and 57 females).

Of the 78 people, 7 were under the age of 16 but were with their parents. 48 participants received counselling and tested for HIV. 15 men, with two under the age of 16, tested after obtaining consent from their parents. The nearby health facility (Carlota Clinic) formed part of the drive by offering a professional nurse to assist, though she left early as it was a Sunday. Mr and Mrs. Machimane facilitated and explained the importance of confidentiality ensuring the participants that their identity and status will never be disclosed to anybody without their explicit permission.

National AIDS Council (NAC) Executive Secretary, Dra Idalina Libombo had a meeting with Jeremias Langa (the National Coordinator of Mozambique) to set the date for the SAVE adoption meeting. Jeremias Langa made a presentation on the effectiveness of the SAVE approach as compared to the ABC approach.

They agreed that the meeting will be held on the 16 of November 2016 and the NAC Executive recommended a quorum of 40 participants from the religious circle as well as other stakeholders. Dra Idalina said, “It is the time to act. The SAVE is a deep and comprehensive prevention methodology that we really have to adopt to help us fight SSDDIM.”

Regional Dialogue meeting between Religious Leaders and the LGBTIQ community; 15- 17 November 2016, Nairobi Kenya.

INERELA+ Mozambique (MONERELA+) held a meeting with NAC Executive Secretary

The regional dialogue meeting between Religious Leaders and the LGBTIQ community took place in Nairobi, Kenya. The dialogue was hosted by INERELA+ Kenya along with Nyanza Rift Valley Western and Kisumu LGBTI Network (NYARWEK) and it was jointly facilitated by the two organizations.
All in all, 29 participants were in attendance comprising of 11 country representatives and 18 other participants from different affiliated organisations. The objective of the meeting was to challenge stereotyping of key populations. The dialogue established that Religious Leaders have a role to play in reducing the stigma and discrimination against sexual minorities. It emerged that Religious Leaders are willing to sensitise other Religious Leaders on the issues of sexuality and spirituality in the context of human rights and HIV responses.