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World Relief Partners With Faith Communities To Address Gender as a Driver and a Barrier in the HIV Epidemic

BALTIMORE – World Relief today marked World AIDS Day by re-committing to address the HIV epidemic, one of the world’s most serious public health challenges. This World AIDS Day, UNAIDS is highlighting “the urgent need to end the inequalities that drive AIDS and other pandemics around the world.” Should these inequalities not be adequately addressed, ending AIDS by 2030 will be an unlikely possibility. In the midst of a prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and a worsening social and economic crisis, World Relief remains committed to assisting the 37.7 million people – 1.7 million of whom are children – worldwide who are living with HIV or AIDS.

“World Relief has worked in HIV/AIDS prevention and care for more than 25 years. Eradicating this global health crisis will take a dedicated and sustained effort from governments, communities and people of faith around the world,” **said Myal Greene, president and CEO of World Relief.** “While progress has been made in many key areas, upholding the rights and protecting the health of all peoples must remain a top priority in the Church’s HIV response.”

Gender-based violence is both a cause and a consequence of HIV. November 25 marked the beginning of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. For 30 years, the international community has come together to amplify voices and speak out against gender-based violence, which affects millions of people worldwide. While the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence runs from November 15 to December 10, World Aids Day falls in the middle, on December 1.

World Relief especially focuses on Malawi, where, as of 2020, 1.1 million people are still living with HIV, with 33,000 new HIV infections each year. Of the 1.1 million living with HIV, 20% reported experiencing physical violence, and 41% reported sexual violence within a year. In Malawi, World Relief’s work is possible through SCOPE HIV, a cooperative agreement with USAID, implementing the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) strategy alongside the Ministry of Health and National AIDS Council.

World Relief is addressing the issue by engaging local faith and community leaders to highlight harmful gender norms that act as a barrier to men and youth and a risk factor for adolescents. World Relief’s SCOPE HIV program in Malawi continues to reach the last mile with HIV care and treatment, and prevent new HIV infections by reducing sexual and gender-based violence. HIV infections in Malawi are declining, but positive gender norms and gender-based violence prevention are critical to sustaining this momentum and reaching every person who needs it with HIV care and treatment. In just seven months of implementing SCOPE activities, **World Relief Malawi has helped 582 survivors gain access to services.** These community volunteers and faith congregations have also intervened to stop child marriages and keep young girls in school.



“Addressing harmful gender norms is crucial to continue the decrease in new infections every year,” **said Emily Chambers Sharpe, World Relief’s Senior Technical Advisor for HIV and Health Strategy.** “Positive gender norms and gender-based violence prevention help us reach the last mile with HIV care and treatment.” Globally, the last mile is described in the 95-95-95 goals—that 95 percent of those living with HIV know their status, 95 percent of people who know their status are on HIV treatment, and 95 of those on treatment reach an undetectable viral load level.

By 2022, World Relief will support 39,000 children to graduate from the IMPower program, preventing an estimated 2,800 cases of sexual violence against boys and girls in Malawi. Additionally, World Relief Malawi is engaging faith leaders to reduce HIV stigma and promote positive messages about available testing, care and treatment for HIV. Through disseminating these messages with their congregations, faith leaders will reach the vulnerable with HIV treatment literacy.

“Faith leaders in Malawi and in vulnerable countries around the world play a key role in helping communities break the silence around HIV and dispel common misinformation. It is crucial that organizations and nations not give up in the fight against HIV/AIDS,” **said Chambers Sharpe.** “As the global community faces the COVID pandemic, we must also continue to invest in HIV treatment support at the grassroots, raising awareness, reducing barriers, and promoting justice for affected and at-risk women, men and children.”

For more information about World Relief’s HIV/AIDS prevention work, other projects and how you can help, visit <https://worldrelief.org/>.

About World Relief

World Relief is a global Christian humanitarian organization that brings sustainable solutions to the world’s greatest problems – disasters, extreme poverty, violence, oppression, and mass displacement. For over 75 years, we’ve partnered with churches and community leaders in the U.S. and abroad to bring hope, healing and transformation to the most vulnerable.

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