

GREETINGS FROM GILGAL EVANGELICAL CHURCH, RWANDA



Photo: Rev Dr Bunini and Rev Sellar exchange gifts outside Bloomfield Presbyterian Church

UPDATE FOR BLOOMFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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GREETINGS FROM GILGAL EVANGELICAL CHURCH!

To our brothers and sisters from Bloomfield Presbyterian church, please receive our love and greetings from all our members of Gilgal congregation.

This last quarter marked a special stamp for our good relationship and partnership during my visit to your church. Thank you for your hospitality and care. I have been really blessed and learnt a lot personally and for our work of serving the church of Christ and community.

Rev Dr Bunini

Senior Pastor, Gilgal Evangelical Church

WHAT WE ARE WORKING TOWARDS

The Church and Community Transformation (CCT) process, also known as Umoja (which means 'togetherness' in Swahili) is a way for the church to work with their local community to help tackle poverty, so that lives can be transformed, both materially and spiritually. It is a process which helps communities to identify the root causes of the issues that they are faced with, and discover the unique strengths and God-given resources that they have which might help bring about this change.

Through Tearfund's partner AESD, Bloomfield Presbyterian Church are helping local churches across Rwanda bring about this kind of empowering and long-term transformation. As part of this relationship, through AESD, Bloomfield Presbyterian Church have also entered into a partnership relationship with Gilgal Evangelical Church, who have already started their journey with CCT.

Bloomfield Presbyterian Church's partnership will help to provide the training that will equip facilitators and churches with the tools that will assist them during the CCT process. In addition to challenging the stigmas associated with HIV and providing training around HIV prevention, the partnership will also help to initiate and equip Self Help Groups (SHGs) - which incorporate savings and loans initiatives - who will be an essential part of bringing socio-economic transformation.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS TAKE PART IN 'ENVISIONING' SESSIONS

July saw 40 local church leaders from five sectors of Nyarugenge District - Nyamirambo, Kimisagara, Nyakabanda, Kigali and Mageragere - taking part in Church and Community Transformation (CCT) training.



Photo: Local church leaders from Nyarugenge District gather after taking part in 'Envisioning' sessions.

AESD/Tearfund

During their time together, the churches, made up of a number of different denominations, covered the topics of:

1. Transformative leadership
2. Transformative churches
3. Transformative small groups

And all have committed to working further with the team.

As part of their time together, the leaders learnt how churches can contribute to Environmental and Economic Sustainability (EES).

After the training one pastor shared:

'Haleluya!!! Am really touched to understand well, the characters of a good leader. We have been called to serve the church and community and not being served.'

We believe the church is uniquely placed to bring complete and lasting transformation through a strategy which meets people's social, economic, environmental, spiritual and emotional needs.

After training and equipping church leaders on resource mobilisation - helping them see the potential of what God has given them in skills, abilities, and different resources - we then help them identify the tools which will help them mobilise resources in their churches and communities.

To help them with this, the team also discussed the role of CCT 'facilitators', who act as a guide for those taking part in the process in their local communities.

After discussing the criteria for selecting a good facilitator, the teams are now working to choose an appropriate person to take on these roles in each of their communities. Their training will start soon...

GILGAL CHURCH LEADER TRAINING

This season, 15 leaders from Gilgal (pastors, ministry and home cell leaders), also took part in training. They met for a one-day workshop to explore church ministry leadership and how to bring transformation within their community.

During these sessions their group too considered the topics of transformative leadership, transformative church and transformative small groups.



Photo: Leaders from Gilgal gather to discuss how to bring transformation within their community. AESD/Tearfund

In Gatare Village, where Gilgal church is located, 70 per cent of the population is poor and vulnerable. The church has a mandate to help its community be freed from poverty, which they hope to do through the CCT approach. To do this the church have been working closely with community leaders to map the issues that affect their community, such as poverty, malnutrition, children living on the streets, street vending, a lack of knowledge around cultures of saving and management, family conflict, and unemployment.

‘...to be in this poor area is not our choice but God’s plan. As we learnt from CCT module regarding God’s plan for all creatures, we have been placed in this are to fulfil his plan on protecting the environment, lead and bring transformation in our community.’

Rev Dr Bunini

To be able to reach out to their community, the church committee leaders learnt how to form transformative small groups, also known as Self Help Groups (SHGs). These offer a space for church and community members to come together to save together, share loans with one another and learn new skills.

'We thank God for this important opportunity to awaken and refresh our mindset on our work of serving God's people. In our preaching and teaching we usually focused on the spiritual part, but we are now aware that teaching that brings transformation must touch a person holistically (physically, spiritually and socially...).'

Local Pastor

SUPPORTING CHILDREN

One of the effects of poverty identified in Gilgal's community is that of children living on the streets, who are particularly vulnerable.

In response to this, Gilgal church's staff have been working with community leaders to advocate for 34 children who have been identified, and grouped together for easy follow-up. Gilgal's staff have made a profile for each child, recording their names, age, gender and the causes of their problems. This analysis showed that they had ended up living on the street for a number of different reasons, including family poverty, conflict and becoming orphans.

All have been registered and are being followed up to ensure they are being cared for and supported.

The effects of living on the street as a means to survive had led some to steal and some to start taking drugs. So through the CCT approach, and the use of Bible studies, the church have been helping the children become freed from these behaviours.

They have also been very happy to attend Sunday services every week and become part of a Sunday school and church choir.

NEW SELF HELP GROUP FORMED

A Self-Help Group (SHG) is a group of people, preferably from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of solving their common problems. Through these groups people not only find financial support, but also social, mutual, emotional and spiritual support.

The groups usually start small savings and loans initiatives so that members can share the benefits from a combined pot of money. Through this they are able to do a number of things, including investing in and expanding their businesses.

In Kigali, street vending, a practice where goods are sold on the street without a license, continues to be an issue, especially in Kigali city.

Already 37 street vendors have formed a Self Help Group which is helping them break free from poverty, begin licensed businesses, ensure sustainability and security for their families. And now 20 more vendors are in the process of forming a group. They have been learning about saving and credit schemes, book keeping and conflict resolution, to help them run their group well.

Those taking part have mentioned how they have valued this training, and appreciate the skills they have acquired about saving and working as a team, whilst being able to share their life experiences. They have also elected a committee of 6 people to lead and manage their savings, with one person in charge of prayer and devotion before and after their weekly meetings. And they have written the bylaws which will guide their team, opened a bank account and agreed a weekly savings amount of RWF 500.

VISITING AND MONITORING THE PROJECT

In the last quarter, field visits were made to monitor the progress and impact of the project so far, and encourage beneficiaries.

It was great to welcome visitors from the Tearfund in the UK who spent time with our street vendors' groups from Gilgal Church and a group of the children they have been working with.

They also visited groups from the Presbyterian Church in Kigali sector where the team were able to meet with another Self Help Group.

VISITING BLOOMFIELD

Then, in September, Dr Bunini, Senior pastor of Gilgal Evangelical Church, paid a visit to Bloomfield Presbyterian Church, to thank them their partnership and support. During this time he shared some achievements from their partnership and some prayer points from Gilgal.

In one week spent there, Dr Bunini felt he'd learnt a lot from Bloomfield church and when he returned back shared his learnings with the congregation at Gilgal, who were very excited and praised God.

PLEASE PRAY

- For Gilgal Evangelical Church and Bloomfield Presbyterian Church's partnership to be lasting and productive.
- For Gilgal's youth choirs who hope to improve their worship and praise by obtaining musical instruments.
- For Gilgal's pastors, that they are able to obtain and meet new government policies which require all pastors and people who preach to have theological training.
- For vulnerable children and their families. Pray that parents experience positive mindset change which reconciles families, and creates positive environments in which children are able to return to school and flourish.
- For widows (some of whom are genocide survivors), for their comfort and emotional support and the development of their families.
- For refugees. One of Gilgal's local churches is located in a refugee camp for Congolese. Pray for their country's peace.
- About disaster risks. Last March and April Rwanda experienced heavy rains which caused loss of life and destroyed infrastructure. As a country of 1000 hills, water protection projects are most useful. Please pray for projects like these and for communities as they respond at such times.
- About unemployment. Especially for our youth, and for vocational training centres to help with the learning of practical skills and the creation of jobs.
- And please pray for peace and security to prevail in both our countries.

A SELF HELP GROUP, A SOURCE OF HOPE

Kalisa*, now 50, is the member of a local Presbyterian Church where she sings in a choir and acts as a treasurer for a local Self Help Group. After losing her husband and child, and returning home to live with her elderly parents, the Self Help Group became a source of hope and support.

Here Kalisa shares her story...

'I thank God for loving me, even though I passed through many problems, I realised that God knows me than myself. It was a joy when I got married and gave birth to my first born but things changed and my heart was shocked and affected by trauma after remaining alone. I struggled a lot with poverty, trauma, hopelessness, solo[loneliness] and pain, and I became shy and cried all the time. I didn't have any hope for the future.



Our land was rocky, not fertile and not productive without manure. Getting food to feed both myself and my parents was really a big problem. Sometimes I spent a day without eating or having more than one meal. My weekly income was about RWF 2,000. I was very poor and very vulnerable.'

Kalisa was in charge of some things at church, so when they used to have visitors she would often be the one to prepare tea and food for them. And on these occasions Kalisa would eat enough and bring back any remaining food for her parents.

Then when a local mining company came and bought her family's land for RWF 400,000 Kalisa was able to build a small house for her parents and buy some basics like food.

'In all my pain and trials, I had never stopped praying and singing to God. When I was alone songs became my comfort and increased my faith and my hope.

In that period my prayer was *"Lord, you know me, why did you accept this to come to me, why me, why am I poor, when I have my hands and my feet, why did you created me like this?"*

In 2015 a local Self Help Group, invited Kalisa to join them. In the group, Kalisa found a place to share her problems. They gave her a loan, which Kalisa's brother added to it. This helped Kalisa start selling bananas. But Kalisa was travelling a long way to sell the fruit.

'I felt physically weak and was not able to carry the basket full of banana. I decided to ask my SHG for a small loan of RWF 30,000, and started selling bananas at home, gaining more than RWF 15,000 Rwf at a time.'



Photo: Kalisa with the bananas which she sells at her home.



AESD/Tearfund

This was a five-fold increase on her previous income. And Kalisa doesn't plan on stopping there. She now has an aim of increasing her capital to RWF 100,000.

'At the end of the year, we shared our savings, from which I was able to buy cement and sand to clean and make my house smart and put electricity in it. Currently, I am thinking hunger for me is history. I am happy that I can also give to the poor and vulnerable people.'

My heart never cries because of problems; I cry when I am happy with the goodness of my God.'

*names changed to protect identity



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