



IMAGE

Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS Gender and Equity

"Tackling structural drivers of HIV/AIDS for effective and sustainable solution"

IMAGE BRIEF PROFILE

1. The IMAGE Programme: A multi-sectoral partnership addressing poverty and gender inequality to reduce women's risk of HIV and gender-based violence in South Africa.

IMAGE Project is a community based HIV and Gender based violence (GBV) prevention programme. It is a collaboration between The Small Enterprise Foundation (SEF), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand. Based in rural South Africa, combined group-based microfinance with a 12-months participatory gender and HIV training curriculum called Sister For Life (SFL); which is fully integrated into SEF's routine loan center meetings. SFL is delivered alongside microfinance services by a separate team of trainers. The purpose of IMAGE is to improve the economic well-being and independence of communities; reduce vulnerability to both HIV and gender-based violence, and foster robust community mobilization to address common concerns.

In addition to the SEF microfinance component of the intervention, the SFL component comprises of two phases delivered over 12 -15 months.

- a) Phase One (first 6 months) consists of ten one-hour training sessions, and covers topics including gender roles, cultural beliefs, power relations, self-esteem, domestic violence and HIV. Participatory methods aim to increase confidence, communication skills and encourage critical thinking about the links between GBV and HIV.
- b) Phase Two (Community Mobilization) encourages wider community mobilization to engage both youth and men in the intervention villages. Women deemed "natural leaders" by their peers are elected by loan centers to undertake a further week of training leadership skills and community mobilization. They return to their loan centers and over the subsequent 6 months, work with their centers to develop 'village-level action plans' that address a range of challenges including priority issues such as HIV and Gender Based Violence (GBV).

2. IMAGE: Rigorously evaluated and results-based

The intervention has been evaluated using a randomized control assessment between 2001-2005, and has demonstrated to reduce rates of gender-based violence by 55%, improve women's self confidence, ability to challenge gender norms, autonomy in decision-making and

collective action. It also Demonstrated improved access to HIV counselling and testing, and reduce high risk sexual behaviour. Many of these gains extend from women who directly participate in the intervention to their household members and wider communities.

The results of the study have also led to national policy change and the formal inclusion of microfinance and the empowerment of women (i.e. addressing social and structural drivers of HIV) into the South African government's Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS , SANAC (South African National AIDS Council's) Strategic Plan for 2007-2011 & 2012-2016) as means to address HIV.

3. Why add a Gender/HIV focus to economic development strategies?

A recent study of the relative benefits of IMAGE as compared to microfinance alone showed evidence of *synergy* across the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Researchers found that while microfinance on its own produced economic benefits, it was only the combined IMAGE model which facilitated wider gains in empowerment, social well-being and health - including the observed reductions in the risk of HIV and violence (J Kim et al, Bulletin of the World Health Organization 2009).

4. Looking to the future: Scaling up in South Africa and sharing best practices

Many programmes never make it beyond the pilot phase and remain “boutique” projects that do not get scaled up. Others have the stated intention of addressing gender inequalities and violence – yet have not been well evaluated.

IMAGE is unique in that; because of its strong strategic cross-sectoral partnership with SEF - a proven microfinance partner , over the past decade since the original study ended, IMAGE has evolved from being a pilot project involving 800 women to become a nonprofit organization that provides SFL training to SEF participants and has expanded to reach at least **35,000 poor rural women across 3 provinces** of South Africa (Limpopo, Gauteng and North West) with its health and social empowerment education (SFL gender and HIV education).

Globally , IMAGE is the first intervention proven to prevent gender-based violence. The success of the work has received attention and spawned similar programs in Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania and Peru where a major expansion supported by the InterAmerican Development Bank is currently underway.

5. Recognition / award

IMAGE in partnership with SEF was globally recognized by the International Centre for Research on Women as the ‘Champion of Change’ on International Women’s Day in Washington DC in 2009 (Please see articles below).

IMAGE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SEF RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AWARD

WASHINGTON D.C. MARCH 4, 2009



Lufuno Muvhango in her acceptance speech to an audience of 400 people in Union Station, Washington, D.C.



The Global 'Champions for Change' award is presented by Geeta Gupta the President of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to the Managing Director of Small Enterprise Foundation John de Wit, and The IMAGE Project Director - Lufuno Muvhango.

Each year, two global awards for excellence are bestowed by the International Centre for Research on Women on International Women's Day to one private sector and one **NGO project who have excelled as 'champions of change' in improving the status of women. The NGO award was given to The IMAGE Project and Small Enterprise Foundation, who work in partnership with Anglo Platinum.**

The program delivers a combined package of microfinance loans for income generation alongside a participatory gender and HIV training curriculum. The IMAGE program aims to improve women's economic wellbeing and financial independence, reduce vulnerability to HIV and gender-based violence, and to foster wider community mobilization to address the key drivers of the HIV pandemic.

The awards ceremony was held in Union Station in Washington DC. The keynote speaker for the event was the Honourable Cherie Blair, wife of former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. The event

was attended by 400 dignitaries including ambassadors, business men and women, Supreme Court Justices, CNN anchors and celebrities. For more information see www.icrw.org/gala/slides/photos.html.

Pictures



Above: IMAGE team together with group of beneficiaries who were part of leadership and Community mobilization skills training on the 14 July 2017.



Above: Some of the 250 beneficiaries who attended the community mobilization launch 25 August 2017 in Hammanskraal.