

In November 2001, at the "Global Consultation on Ecumenical Responses to the Challenges of HIV and AIDS in Africa" in Nairobi, Church leaders of Africa, international and African ecumenical organisations developed a co-ordinated "**Plan of Action**".

With this Plan of Action the churches committed themselves, among other things, to:

- condemn discrimination & stigmatization of people living with HIV;
- ensure that people living with HIV are supported and become involved in activities of the church as an essential resource;
- promote accurate information on HIV and AIDS, revise new curricula for theological institutions, develop participatory educational programs, empower women and girls, educate men to change their behaviour and take responsibility for containing the spread of HIV;
- develop curricula and training materials on HIV and AIDS at all levels within the church; equip a new generation of church leaders to engage the churches on issues related to HIV and AIDS;
- promote effective means of prevention and practices that save lives; promote voluntary testing and counseling;
- support existing care and counseling structures and build a movement of care that originates from communities;
- encourage congregations to make available buildings and property for the support, training and care for people living with HIV;
- support local congregations in caring for vulnerable groups, especially children,

orphans, widow(er)s and caregivers; encourage and support networks of HIV positive clergy;

- advocate for access to health-care, ARVs, and prevention of mother to child transmission.

The Plan of Action includes the following Vision:

With this Plan of Action, the ecumenical family envisions a transformed and life-giving church, embodying and thus proclaiming the abundant life to which we are called, and capable of meeting the many challenges presented by the epidemic. For the churches, the most powerful contribution in combating HIV transmission is the eradication of stigma and discrimination: a key that will open the door for all those who dream of a viable and achievable way of living with HIV and preventing the spread of the virus.

It also called for the setting up of an enabling support structure under the World Council of Churches, now known as :

Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA)

EHAIA describes the HIV competent churches through six main objectives:

1. The teaching and practice of churches indicate clearly that "stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV is sin and against the will of God".
2. Churches, their leaders, members and ecumenical partners have a full understanding of

the severity and challenges of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Africa, with special attention to human sexuality, gender, culture, sexual violence and violence against women and children.

3. Churches in Africa reach out and respond to collaborative efforts, reinforcing efforts where they already exist in the field of HIV and AIDS.
4. Churches in Africa strengthen their capacity to promote and implement evidence-based prevention of HIV taking into consideration pastoral, cultural and gender issues.
5. Churches in Africa mobilise and utilise their resources and structures efficiently and effectively, collaborating with other service providers where appropriate, to provide holistic care and support for people living with and affected by HIV.
6. Build the capacity of EHAIA to deliver the above objectives.

EHAIA is present in Africa through five regional co-ordinators and two theology consultants. Their addresses can be found on the last page.

What can churches expect from EHAIA's Regional Coordinators?

- Advice on how to start or intensify own implementation of the Plan of Action through denominational or local policy papers;
- Special HIV and AIDS retreats for church leaders;
- Courses to include HIV into the curricula of clergy and lay-training institutions;
- Training of trainers for church group leaders (women, youth, men);

- Capacity building for planning of programmes and resource mobilisation to implement them;
- Exchange visits with churches for sharing of good practice;
- Resource persons for HIV and AIDS discussions in synods, assemblies, and gatherings;
- Printed and visual material for work with the congregations and communities.

If you have any such or similar requirements, please contact one of EHAIA's staff in your region or the project coordinator!

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... for an HIV competent Church

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