

Getting to the Heart of the Matter – Annex 1

1YO – one year on



For the full context of this Annex, refer to the report entitled “Getting to the Heart of the Matter” published by SCWA in 2018.

...access online via « <https://stop-cwa.org/search/resources?name=heart+of+the+matter> »

Setting the scene...

For localities where accusations of witchcraft against children are an everyday reality, SCWA has developed an effective Model of Change, working alongside local leaders in the churches to advocate and act by challenging harmful beliefs and practices, and by providing positive alternatives. The Model of Change proposes: developing relationships and forming a Planning Committee; researching understandings using Focus Groups; facilitating dialogue via an Action Forum; inspiring action through Interactive Training Workshops; and cascading impact into the wider community.

Our resource entitled *The Heart of the Matter* is the material we have developed in response to the outcomes of the Action Forums for use in the Interactive Training Workshops, and this we piloted during 2017 and 2018. Our initial evaluation of these pilots, based on the immediate feedback, was given in our report entitled, *Getting to the Heart of the Matter* published in 2018.

In this Annex, we now take a longer-term look at the outcome of the pilot workshops. We are interested in the final stage of the Model of Change, namely: wider community impact.

Recalling the locations...

One of the original workshops was run in Yokoe near Lomé, capital of Togo, and the other three in regions of the D.R.Congo, namely, Lubumbashi, Goma, and Kananga. This selection gave a diversity of environments, rural versus urban, instability versus relatively stable, remote versus more easily accessible. Notably, in all these locations there is a very high prevalence of accusations of witchcraft against children, and consequent stigma and abuse.

More detail on the context of each of these four locations is expounded in the full *Getting to the Heart of the Matter* report.

No change, or real change?

On the final day of *The Heart of the Matter* pilot workshops in 2017 and 2018, pastors, church leaders, children's workers, and others attending expressed many enlightening insights and positive changes in attitude as a result of their new-found learning. Most of them also stated their intent to change their practice concerning their interactions with children and young people, whether in their congregations or the wider community. Prior to this training all had been aware of (and some encouraged, or were involved in) the stigmatisation and abuse of children arising from accusations of witchcraft made against these children. Yet immediately following the workshops, we were surprised to witness the emergence of new champions in the cause of children's welfare and rights – or so it would seem, from some of the remarkable testimonies on the feedback forms after the events.

The question that we are seeking to answer in this 'one year on' Annex is this: "Did the initial enthusiasm (and in some cases, apparent radical reversal of orientation) actually result in a deeply rooted transformative reality in the lives and relationships of those who participated?" To find answers to this, we have drawn upon follow-up surveys conducted by the Facilitators with the original participants in each of the four locations.

QUESTIONS

In the follow-up surveys, the following questions were asked:

- Did you prepare a Personal Action Plan after the training? ...if yes, have you been able to put it into practice? In what way? ...if no, have you done things differently in the light of the training you received? What changes have you made?
- What changes have you noticed since the training? ...a. in your personal life? ...b. in your church? ...c. in your community? Please include figures and specific testimonies. Why do you think that these changes are directly linked to the training?
- What do you plan to do during the year ahead to bring about / reinforce / build upon this transformation?
- How will you share what you have learnt in order to encourage others?

RESPONSES

While we have entitled this the 'one year on' data, in fact the surveys were performed variously 11, 13, 16, and 18 months after the original workshops in the four locations.

Much of the data is qualitative since it is rare for cases of child witch accusation to be reported or recorded, so direct numerical 'before and after' comparisons are unreliable, if not impossible to achieve. Also, it is not simple to quantify the number of people reached through cascading the learning, as the process is often organic and informal. For one location we do have some quantitative figures, where the roll-out of the training and the collection of follow-up data has been more systematic. We have sought to reflect accurately the results of the survey by including many personal accounts in the respondents' own words.

As the principal aim of *The Heart of the Matter* is to realign thinking and practice via a process of theologically informed enquiry, the use of qualitative data is particularly helpful in

determining whether attitudes, beliefs, and actions have been changed, and whether that change persists over time.

Epicentres unsettled...

The four locations chosen for the pilot workshops are all known to be localities where accusations of witchcraft made against children are a significant issue, with the resulting stigma and abuse resulting in physical and psychological harm, and rejection by family and community.

For our insights into the reality 'one year on', we will now look at the responses from each of the four locations in turn.

KANANGA, KASAÏ-CENTRAL, D.R.CONGO

In Kasaï province, Pastor Jean-Claude N. facilitated the pilot workshop with the Presbyterian Church with 12 participants during June of 2017. The follow-up survey was completed in December 2018.

Leaders of the church in Kananga have creatively reproduced the learning from the workshops "onto an educational canvas" which they use to inform families, churches, and communities. The training provided an impetus "to improve our awareness campaigns" focusing on specific target groups and channels of influence.

Progress so far:

As a result, the Facilitator reports that:

- 3278 people have been educated by the 12 who participated in the original workshop;
- 22 congregations from different faiths have received educational input on this issue;
[note: not clear whether "faiths" refers to other churches or denominations.]
- 5 localities in the towns of Kananga have benefited from awareness-raising activities.

Personal accounts:

"Before the training we had another way of interpreting different psycho-social and emotional behaviours that a child might present (having nightmares, wetting the bed...) which would make me accuse them of being a witch. After this training, I understand that these things are not witchcraft, but normal things that every child goes through." [Source: K01LD]

"It is true that some members of our church were accusing children of being witches, even though that was not the case. Our explanations helped parishioners to understand that children are human beings created in the image of God, and that we should love them and treat them as our neighbours. Some mothers have really adopted this, and continue to educate others during their meetings." [Source: K01LD]

Future plans:

Building upon the successes so far, in the year ahead there are plans to:

- increase awareness-raising sessions, teaching households, and holding community debates with church and community members;
- organise follow-on meetings to equip participants for ongoing education on this subject; and also

- organise a survey before and after the sessions in order to measure the changes.

GOMA, D.R.CONGO

Pastor Jean–Paul A. is the primary Facilitator of the Goma pilot. The workshop was held during August 2017, and the follow–up survey completed in September 2018 by 11 of the 17 original attendees.

Progress so far:

Positive change has been seen in Goma as a result of the approach introduced through *The Heart of the Matter*. Participants exhibit a sense of confidence and energy about what they have learnt from the training workshop, and so they are willing and able to share it with others. They are continuing to actively pass on the teaching at multiple levels, including with individuals, with families, and with whole church congregations, not just in their own church denomination but with other church streams in the city (in more than one district of Goma). They have also directed an intentional focus towards informing mothers, and the so-called ‘prophetic’ figures in the churches.

The effects of this movement are being seen in the local community. One Pastor notes: “Thanks to this training, the situation is starting to change. ... Now children are beginning to be protected and safe.” [Source: G02RS]

personal

Most of the respondents indicated that after the training, change had begun initially with themselves and their own family:

- markedly significant change in personal insight, attitude, and behaviour: eight of the 11 respondents state this directly. [Sources: G01ND, G03QZ, G04AQ, G07HG, G08TL, G09KB, G10KN, G11FN]
- family intervention: one church member now engages on weekly basis with own extended family to improve awareness of this issue, and to share learning. [Source: G08TL]

church

Several churches were represented by the respondents, some of whom had connections with, or responsibility for, more than one church. Some were pastors or leaders, while others had other roles, or were simply members of a congregation. A wide spectrum of changes are observable in the responses given:

- markedly significant change in church leaders’ insights, attitudes, and behaviours: noted by four respondents, all pastors, one of whom is working with a cluster of several churches. [Sources: G01bND, G06SL, G07HG, G09KB]
- markedly significant change in church members’ insights, attitudes, and behaviours: noted by three pastors. [Sources: G06bSL, G09KB, G10KN]
- church has implemented a Child Protection Policy and appointed a Child Protection Officer, and is teaching church members about child protection. [Source: G06bSL]

- full trainings (using The Heart of the Matter) for other leaders in the church, especially those with a prophetic role, and shorter trainings for the congregational members. [Source: G06SL]
- one day of training each month for those in the church who have a prophetic role, which has radically changed their approach: they no longer accuse or confirm accusations, and guidelines on appropriate methods of prayer with children (no shaking, hitting, other maltreatment) have been imposed. [Source: G06bSL]
- engaging with church leaders from villages in a particular district (Himbi) and sharing learning from the training. [Source: G09KB]
- run training course over a two week period with a cluster of CEBC* churches:
 - some of these pastors publicly renounced their former malpractice and have committed to treat all children with love and respect;
 - some families have welcomed their own rejected children back into their homes;
 - some children have reported to the leader that the attitude of their parents towards them has completely changed and is now positive;
 - one church has produced a music video about protecting children from harm. [Source: G01ND]
- educating church members (through preaching and teaching) on this issue. [Source: G010ND]
- new counselling approach to parental problems in the church. [Source: G01ND]
- children who left the church choir have returned after a change in the leadership from a harsh abrasive leader to a kind welcoming leader. [Source: G03QZ]
- church members know how to advocate and defend children when there is maltreatment or accusations. [Source: G06SL]

community

Local neighbourhood impacts are not merely through the fact that there is a more positive environment in the church. Opportunities for direct interventions in the community have also been pursued:

- teams of two to four persons go together into the local community (Birere) to raise awareness. [Source: G02RS]
- perceived reduction in numbers of children accused in local area. [Sources: G02RS, G05FH]
- children's clubs started with informing them of their value and rights, and encouraging them to speak up and break the silence around any form of abuse. [Source: G06SL]
- in one community, a pastor has set up three children's clubs serving a total of 85 children. [Source: G01ND]
- forbidding harmful forms of punishment (specifically: whipping, beating, torture). [Source: G06SL] [note: the context is not specified here, however understood by independent observer to refer to children within the family environment.]
- one school teacher's approach to children has significantly improved. [Source: G05FH]
- one pastor is serving as a mediator between children and parents, to promote understanding of children's needs and promote their wellbeing. [Source: G01ND]
- reconciliation between many parents and their children. [Source: G06SL]

- active intervention visiting families where abuse of child is evident or observed, or an accusation has been made against a child, to inform parents of children's needs. [Source: G06SL]
- meeting with parents in the community on weekly basis. [Source: G08TL]

Personal accounts:

Several very clear accounts of change are recorded among the responses. The positive impact is still evident more than one year on from the pilot training course:

"It has totally changed the way I treat children myself. I used to have a terrible relationship with them, but now I really enjoy spending time with them, I chat with them and listen to them and treat them with gentleness and respect. Before the training, we understood nothing about children who are accused of witchcraft, and before the training, I behaved badly towards these and other children." [Source: G01ND]

"There are parents who come to us in the church for help when they think their children are witches. I follow the approach taught in The Heart of the Matter for how to respond in these situations. It is usually not hard to get to the bottom of what is really causing the problem in the family or the difficult behaviour of the child and once that has been addressed, parents say that their children's behaviour has totally changed, as has their belief that their child is a witch." [Source: G01ND]

"It has given me the courage to go into my community to challenge the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations against children." [Source: G02RS]

"I have changed my behaviour at home. I have adopted children who live with me and I take the time to talk with them so that I know that all is well with them — I have really changed. I used to be very strict, unkind, constantly shouting at the children, and when I got angry, I never listened to the children. But because of the training, I am not like that any more and I create time to listen to my children before I act." [Source: G03QZ]

"I have mainly developed a peaceful attitude towards the children I care for in my role as a school leader. — I am much less fiery in my own reactions towards children." [Source: G05FH]

"There have been really big changes. I have come to understand that children are innocent, vulnerable and unaware. The training has had a big impact in my own family, and I have noticed a new harmony there." [Source: G06SL]

"People understand that these children are not witches. The adults in the church have realised that they are the direct mediators between children and adults. They know how to advocate for and defend them when there is maltreatment. Many children used to suffer a lot because they did not know how to express themselves and they used to have no one to stand up for their rights. In our church, we now teach that children are valuable and useful members of society. They are the future. These changes are definitely because of the training. Many parents and children have been reconciled and others have repented for having abused children." [Source: G06SL]

"We now visit certain families in their homes when we have noticed that some kind of abuse of the children is taking place or an accusation of witchcraft has been made, and we tell them about the serious negative impact this is having on their children. There has been a change because parents used to deny children their fundamental needs, but now they understand that their children have those needs. We also forbid any form of punishment which harms the children's health." [Source: G06SL]

"I have been completely changed by the training I received on The Heart of the Matter. Before, I was really nasty to my own children and my neighbours' children and used to slap them all the time. Now, I am very different and I have become their friend. — In the church where I am pastor, I have begun to preach that children are a gift of God and that God loves them." [Source: G07HG]

"I had no understanding of this issue for a long time, but since the training in The Heart of the Matter, I understand that children are vulnerable and innocent of any accusation of witchcraft. If a child's basic needs are

not met, he will find other strategies for survival, which are often negative. It is the failure to meet his needs that is at the root of his behaviour, not witchcraft.” [Source: G08TL]

“In our nation there is a phenomenon called ‘Kitshundo’ which means ‘deliverance’. This involves shaking, hitting, shouting, inappropriately touching a man or woman (or child), to ‘deliver’ him or her from possession or witchcraft. — It all starts with either a prophet who influences them or a sudden change in the behaviour of the child, often because of the way he is being treated by the family and by a refusal to take responsibility, but rather to pile all the blame on the head of the child. — I mobilise, raise awareness and spread the message to church congregations so that they know that this is not right, and how they should act in such circumstances.” [Source: G08TL]

“I grew up in a church where accusations of witchcraft against children were well known. I used to see cases of ‘deliverance’ take place and I believed that the pastors were correct. I myself had an erroneous understanding of children. When I saw a child who was dirty, poor, skinny, I automatically believed that he or she was a witch. But since I came into contact with The Heart of the Matter, my perceptions have completely changed. I passionately believe this teaching, and want to spread it as widely as possible in my capacity as an experienced trainer. — As a church leader, I frequently return to the teachings of The Heart of the Matter and I have helped my congregation to understand that no child is accused of witchcraft in the Bible and that children are falsely accused here. I am thankful for the changed attitudes and thinking that this teaching has brought.” [Source: G09KB]

“The Heart of the Matter completely changed the way that I personally think about children who are accused of witchcraft. I have always had a passionate concern for child protection, but I had not fully understood the impact of child witch accusations until I prepared for and led this training. I want to reach as many people as possible with it as we must stop this phenomenon, which is wrecking lives.” [Source: G09bKB]

“I needed to start with my own family. My wife and I changed our way of behaving with my own children because of our new understanding of their value in the eyes of God and of the potential of traumatising them through harsh treatment, which could result in an accusation of witchcraft against them. I think that changing thinking and behaviour in families is key.” [Source: G10KN]

“This training has really helped my family because it completely changed my heart. I think very differently now about children and it has made me love children more. I used to be very bad-tempered at home. My children used to have various names for me because I was always angry. Now they come to me without fear and each of my children now just calls me ‘Mum’.” [Source: G11FN]

“[In the church] when someone brings a child who is believed to be a witch, I no longer confirm the accusation but speak quietly with the child and the parents, treat the child lovingly and help the parents to understand that he or she is not a witch and that there is no example of a child being accused of witchcraft in the Bible. — [In the community] I have a new approach, using the teaching in The Heart of the Matter. When I am with a neighbour who has been mistreating their child because the child has wet itself, I speak to the child to find out why this might have happened. Then I talk to the parent and explain that this is not a sign of witchcraft but has been caused by the way the child has been treated.” [Source: G11FN]

Future plans:

In response to the question about further plans, some respondents had a much clearer intent than others. This was particularly true of church leaders with a wider circle of influence. Some intend to engage informally with their neighbourhood families and friends, whereas others aspire to engage people on a wider level. The following were among the intentions expressed:

- seek out opportunity to use local media to raise awareness. [Source: G01ND]
- hold a child protection conference for adults in different churches, [Source: G06SL] and further teaching on child protection for all adults in the church. [Source: G06bSL, G07HG]

- continue to educate church members, sharing learning through preaching and teaching, [Source: G01ND, G11FN] ...or through other creative means, such as music and song. [Source: G08TL]
- creating friendship groups where the teaching can be shared, [Source: G02RS] or simply sharing with neighbours. [Source: G11FN]
- further empowering of children in the church against abuse using a safeguarding resource called “Touch Talk”. [Source: G06SL]
- raise awareness with 10 more churches. [Source: G08TL]
- run training with 10 families, [Source: G08TL] or for groups of parents. [Source: G09KB]
- meet with local community leaders. [Source: G09KB]
- educate those being trained specifically about Congolese law and the UN–CRC.* [Source: G08TL]
- intention to pass on the learning: out of the 11 written response forms, about half indicate a more formal plan to engage with churches [G01ND, G05FH?, G06SL, G07HG, G08TL], or their local community; [G02RS, G05FH?, G08TL, G09KB] the rest intend to continue sharing their learning, at least informally. [G02RS, G04AQ, G05FH, G10KN, G11FN]

LUBUMBASHI, D.R.CONGO

Leaders of the Kimbilio organisation ran the pilot workshop in November 2017, with a total of some 30 participants. Some of these were delegates from the Ministry of Social Affairs, and some were staff of the organisation. The rest were bishops, deacons, and pastors in Anglican churches, or students from the Anglican theological seminary. This follow-up survey was completed in October 2018 with 14 of the original attendees.

Progress so far:

One respondent stated candidly: “In my community there has not been a lot of change. There are many false pastors, prophets, apostles and bishops who wrong people with false prophecies to earn money, but they don’t live a spiritual life as God tells us to.” [Source: L05TN] It is a stark reminder that the positive changes evident in some churches and communities are like drops in the ocean. It will take endurance and persistence to see this impact grow.

personal

Again, we begin with personal change. Survey respondents report the following impacts on their personal thinking and practice since attending the pilot workshop:

- personal change in insight and awareness, no longer in ignorance, [Source: L03RN, L09CD, L11MD, L13NE] especially towards children on the streets. [Source: L14DN]
- personal awareness of the law and children’s rights, including UN–CRC* and ACRWC.* [Source: L01NP]
- beginning with own family, ensuring good care of the children. [Source: L07DT]
- personal change in working practice (respondent works in a children’s day care centre), prioritising listening to children. [Source: L10DC]

church

Change is also evident among church leaders, and among families who attend. Intentional sharing of the learning through sessions of teaching and training, is evidently having some positive impact in the congregations, but also in how the church responds to children in the wider community:

- training of leaders in the church about their responsibilities as leaders. [Source: L01NP, L04LP]
- practical training in the church on: how to respond to an accusation of witchcraft against a child. [Source: L01NP, L04LP]
- teaching in the church on: the reality of false prophets who divide families, children's rights, and child protection. [Source: L01NP]
- teaching for leaders, for youth, and for children on child protection and children's rights [Source: L03RN]
- shared the learning with at least two further parishes (Safina de Kapolowe, and St François de Mokambo), who have now requested more training [Source: L11MD]
- awareness raising in five other churches. [Source: L14DN]
- teaching parents in the church on the value of children and their needs. [Source: L08BL, L12FN]
- teaching for church members on false accusations, and children's developmental needs, with improved understanding (especially among mothers) as a result. [Source: L13NE]
- three families in the church have each taken back children who had been abandoned [Source: L12FN]
- enhanced respect towards children observed in the churches (in two parishes), and the church is now actively engaging with children living on the streets, no longer view them as thieves. [Source: L14DN]
- some street children now attending and participating in church (serving, choir singing, scripture reading). [Source: L14DN]
- church is helping orphaned children. [Source: L02NN]

community

Beyond the local church the following changes have been observed. Some of these are more concrete, others are impressions:

- one social worker indicates taking a different approach with families as a result of the learning, encouraging people not to judge children by their appearance, but to understand the challenges they face. [Source: L02NN]
- using the learning as a model approach in local [Kimbilio] children's centre. [Source: L10DC]
- educating people about the national law that prohibits making accusations of witchcraft. [Source: L06UU]
- offered advice based on the training to people in the community [Source: L11MD]
- sharing in the market place on the value of children and their needs. [Source: L08BL, L12FN]
- sharing one-to-one with neighbours about the law and children's protection rights. [Source: L04LP]
- awareness raising campaign in local community. [Source: L09CD]

- positive change in the community, sense of collective responsibility for welfare of children. [Source: L04LP]
- feeling empowered (as a pastor) to protect children from abuse. [Source: L10DC]
- one respondent states that [in the community] “I have seen the total transformation of around 20 families.” [Source: L08BL] and another writes “I noticed a complete transformation in around 15 families.” [Source: L12FN]
- taking some children off the streets to provide care and educate them in the school [Source: L14DN]

Personal accounts:

Here are some extracts of personal testimonies:

“After teaching my family members, I saw that my grandmother, who used to accuse children of being witches, has now stopped because of the teaching. — She has changed and no longer drives the children away from home.” [Source: L07DT]

“One mother went to retrieve her child who had been accused of witchcraft from the Muzé Kabila market where he had been living on the streets.” [Source: L08BL]

“One father, [Monsieur Roi], went to find his son whom he had suspected of being a witch, and brought him home from the market place.” [Source: L12FN]

“In my personal life, as a result of the training and the valuable teaching in the training, I see myself as responsible for the consequences of my own behaviour and I must not seek someone who is behind my sufferings or a scapegoat because in the Bible there is no case where a child is accused of being a witch because of someone’s misfortune. This is the biggest change in my personal life.” [Source: L09CD]

“As a leader in my parish I see many problems regarding children who are called witches. We must listen to them, love them, and help their families. — We must reject false prophets and help the church to love children as Jesus loved us.” [Source: L10DC]

Future plans:

As with respondents in other localities, there is a mixture of formal plans and informal intentions in respect of how to continue to share the learning:

- plan for further training sessions, including teaching on child protection in other parts of the city. [Source: L03RN]
- focus days to be held for church leaders, women, and those responsible for the children’s home, and reception centre. [Source: L03RN]
- seminar teachings, including positive parental training and children’s rights promotion, for particular groups (fathers, mothers, youth). [Sources: L10DC, L13NE]
- meetings for leaders of children and youth. [Source: L03RN]
- hold further seminars for church and community. [Source: L12FN]
- continue to teach on this topic through sermons. [Source: L14DN]
- intention to “encourage others through awareness raising, workshops, teaching, advice, conferences, and meetings”. [Source: L01NP]
- informal one-to-one sharing of knowledge of the law through personal conversations. [Source: L04LP]
- informal advocacy for street children, [Source: L07DT] and an advocacy campaign. [Source: L09CD]
- intention to intervene in cases of accusations. [Source: L10DC]

One respondent expressed a strong desire to see training such as *The Heart of the Matter* taught in all theological colleges and seminaries, and that the government should require all pastors to undertake this training. [Source: L05TN]

LOMÉ, TOGO

Leaders of MECI* hosted the pilot workshop in Yokoe near Lomé during July 2017. At the event there were 18 members of the IPCT* churches in the district. Follow-up survey responses were completed by five of the original attendees in December 2018.

Progress so far:

While these reports only come from a limited number of those who benefited from *The Heart of the Matter*, it is nonetheless clear that there have been some valuable outcomes.

personal

Personal change remains the underlying motivator for other actions and intentions:

- taking personal responsibility to address own problems, no longer seeking a scapegoat. [Source: Y01SU]
- significantly enhanced personal understanding of normal child development, the impact of trauma, and of God's heart for children. [Source: Y04FB]
- own thinking about witchcraft and accusations has changed, awareness that so-called indicators are not due to witchcraft. [Source: Y04FB]
- no longer consider disability and children's behaviour as linked to curses or the demonic. [Source: Y02ZQ]
- now consider children to be important, no longer treat them as possessed, but rather seek to understand the factors that may cause children to act in particular ways. [Source: Y05TU]

church

Respondents attend more than one church in the locality. The following actions and impressions were given by respondents on their survey forms:

- training was held in April 2018 for church children's workers in South Maritime region. [Source: Y01SU]
- addressed errors in the way the church teaches and supports children, specifically no longer subjecting children to fasting and deliverance rituals [Source: Y05TU]
- sharing training with leaders of other churches [Source: Y02ZQ]
- elements of the training taught to children's workers [Source: Y02ZQ] and church members, [Sources: Y02ZQ, Y03LB] including about caring for vulnerable people (particularly orphans, elderly, children with disabilities). [Source: Y04FB]
- training people in the church on how to become advocates and protectors of children who are accused. [Source: Y04FB]
- children with disabilities are now included and participate in activities. [Source: Y01SU]
- change in how leaders treat children, more kindness, no more shouting over them. [Source: Y01SU]

- church members have greater understanding of their parental responsibilities, and they listen to their children more, no longer shout at them, but rather treat them with kindness and respect. [Source: Y02ZQ]

community

One of the attendees reports on change in a local NGO working with marginalised children. Another notes their impression of the beginnings of positive change:

- awareness raised among parents and children connected to an NGO in Sanguera (outside Lomé). [Source: Y06QZ via Y01SU]
- the NGO Director indicated improved understanding of certain behaviour patterns in children. [Source: Y06QZ via Y01SU]
- some people in the community have changed their thinking about witchcraft and accusations. [Source: Y04FB]

Personal accounts:

We have two short accounts here, one of positive personal impact, the other indicating an intervention with neighbours in the community:

"I noticed a big change in my life. The training I received opened my eyes on many things concerning children. Before, I used to believe that disability and some children's behaviours were linked to curses, or a spell cast on the family, or demon possession. But the module on normal childhood developments and the impact of trauma led me to understand that mood changes, sleep difficulties, aggression, have nothing to do with the demonic. Since then, my approach when faced with such behaviour in children has changed. I understand them better, I understand the child now and I accept them with love and work with them to change their behaviour. This training was for me a light that illuminated my darkness." [Source: Y02ZQ]

"One church member even told of having gone to the defence of a neighbour's child who was accused of being a witch because the child was reckless and aggressive. His explanation enabled the parents to see that the child's behaviour could be because of trauma, and changed their behaviour towards him." [Source: Y02ZQ]

Future plans:

The following are the expressed intentions for the year ahead of the five who responded:

- rerun the training with church members, to reinforce the learning. [Source: Y02ZQ]
- encourage children's workers to train others using the learning they have acquired. [Source: Y01SU]
- share the teaching with children's leaders in other churches of the same denomination. [Source: Y01SU]
- engage leaders from other churches to advocate for children. [Source: Y02ZQ]
- share experiences through small group meetings (with other Christians) [Source: Y05TU]
- informal sharing with others, [Source: Y04FB] and awareness raising one-to-one. [Source: Y05TU]

Significant stirrings...

Limitations of the follow-up responses to the pilot workshop are clear: most are nigh impossible to quantify, not all the original attendees were engaged in this latter survey, some question responses (in the original French) were unclear, and expressed intentions for the year ahead were sometimes nebulous. Yet nonetheless, from these responses there is absolutely no

doubt that many of those who attended have experienced some significant personal shift in their perspective, perhaps one might use the term 'epiphany', and that this continues to influence their thinking and motivate their actions, particularly towards children in three contexts: the home, the church, and the neighbourhood streets.

Following this summary section, under the title '**In your own words**' there are more than fifteen accounts of real interventions where the outcome for a child (and in some cases a whole family) was positive as a result of the insights and actions of a person who has attended ***The Heart of the Matter*** workshop. Perhaps anecdotal, but we continue to hear of such incidents, and these indicate something of the effectiveness of the training.

Furthermore, several respondents indicate that the learning has been shared (whether the whole, or in part) with other churches in their own or neighbouring localities, including adapting the original five-day course for seminars, sermons, awareness campaigns, marketplace advocacy, family counselling, and personal conversations. This impetus implies an urgent need for accessible materials that can be used to begin to provoke change. The power of ***The Heart of the Matter*** lies in its non-confrontational approach, encouraging people of faith, particularly church leaders, to critique their own thinking and action in the light of a theologically informed enquiry into the scriptures they read.

Facilitators of the workshops have had further opportunity to champion the cause of children:

- the lead Facilitator in Goma, D.R. Congo, is now systematically training church leaders in the Masisi area, where villages are an epicentre for accusations. Many children from here have fled to the city streets following accusations or abuse linked to accusations of witchcraft in the villages;
- also in Goma, local authorities have expressed interest in engaging with this programme and in upholding child protection;
- the Facilitator in Lomé, Togo, has sought and been given the opportunity to speak on the programme at a church conference in Burkina Faso, opening the door to introducing the programme there;
- the Council of Churches in Togo are planning a systematic roll-out of this programme across the churches in Togo.

Next level...

Questions arise as to how to maintain the impetus of change. Alongside the publication of the training workshop material, accompanying audio resources have been developed by Feba Radio and HCR,* including a series of radio programmes and an audio drama. [Note that a separate evaluation report for these audio resources may be made available by HCR.]

Specific requests received for next steps include:

- access to radio resources;
- resources for use in a family context;
- translation of materials into local languages, specifically Kiswahili and Lingala in the first instance;

- topically focused resources, such as addressing the link between accusations and public health, for example.

Opportunities are also emerging to use this approach and these training resources in other nations, potentially including locations in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Though the key here, as in Togo and in the D.R. Congo, is establishing positive relationships with leaders who are keen to champion change in their churches and communities.

Leaders in each pilot location will need to consider their options and resources for maintaining momentum. SCWA will continue to keep in contact with these Facilitators, as well as forging ahead in new locations where we have trusted contacts. Also, drawing on our own Focus Group research, we will continue to help develop related resources that meet local needs.

Footnotes:

- * ACRWC = African Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- * CEBC = Communauté des Églises Baptistes au Congo et en Afrique
- * CGC = Church of God of Congo
- * HCG = Holy Church, Goma
- * HCR = Health Communication Resources (an NGO)
- * IPCT = International Pentecostal Church of Togo
- * Kimbilio = a local CBO (Community Based Organisation)
- * LVLE = Laissez Vivre Les Enfants
- * MECI = Mission Enfant pour Christ International
- * UN-CRC = United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

In your own words...

We have lifted the following accounts directly from respondents' survey forms, without any editing (though as needed they have been translated from the original language). Each gives the story of a child or family affected by accusations of witchcraft. Each also shows clearly how insights acquired as a result of the learning experience at *The Heart of the Matter* workshops has enabled an understanding and a response that seeks the welfare and wellbeing of the children involved. Not all of the outcomes are ideal, but they are all better than if no positive intervention (motivated by the training) had occurred.

KANANGA, KASAÏ-CENTRAL, D.R.CONGO

"I had an 11-year-old son who wet the bed every night. I treated him inhumanly by hitting him every day. One day, my husband and I went to see a Pastor-Prophet, and we told him about our son's problem. The prophet prophesied that the boy was a witch. From that moment, the situation escalated and we lost all the love that we had towards our son. Finally, we decided to throw him out of the house. The child was picked up by his maternal aunt, who is a nurse. She took him to a local hospital. The doctor said that the child had a biological problem that needed medical intervention. After getting health care, the boy stopped wetting the bed. Today, our son is in 5th grade in secondary school education. We concluded that the Pastor misled us to separate us from our own son, because today we are scared and too ashamed to ask our sister to return our son." [Source: K02NC via K01LD]

GOMA, D.R.CONGO

"One teenage boy was thrown out of his house and began sleeping at the church because a prophet said he was a witch. I was able to talk with him to find out what had happened, then visit the family and pass on some of the teaching I have received. This showed them that their son was not a witch and he is now back living in harmony with his parents." [Source: G01ND]

"One 16-year-old girl was accused of being a witch by her family, and her mother wanted to throw her out of the house. When I found out what was happening and established all the facts, we sat the girl down with the family and helped the mother to understand that her daughter was not a witch. Today, the girl is at ease and living happily with her family." [Source: G06bSL]

"One mother brought her own daughter to me, suspecting that she was a witch, simply because she was having nightmares. When I spoke with the girl, I discovered that the nightmares were being caused by the games that were being played with her group of friends. I was able to explain this to the mother. The girl stopped playing with this group, and the nightmares stopped. The family is now living happily together." [Source: G06bSL]

"My half sister has a daughter who is 16 and who was still wetting the bed every night and was doing badly at school. This was all attributed to witchcraft, and she was believed to be under the control of a powerful witch, which was why she was wetting the bed. She was abused and mistreated and traumatised by everyone in the family. They had even given her a new nickname to indicate that she was the sister who wet the bed. After my training on The Heart of the Matter, I started to teach the family, showing them that what they were doing was all wrong. I explained that wetting the bed could be for many reasons, rather than being linked to witchcraft. I told them about the effects of trauma, or maybe she was simply overwhelmed, or even afraid of waking the others. Eventually, they understood, and the girl is living with the family without difficulty. They have stopped mistreating her and she now rarely wets the bed." [Source: G08bTL]

"One of my fellow pastors, the leader of several churches in Goma and in the villages around the city, used to be a keen supporter of accusations of witchcraft made against children and he used to hold frequent 'deliverance' ceremonies. I invited him to the pilot and he came along. He was very engaged as I continued with the second day's training. Suddenly he stood up and asked to speak. I let him do so and he said 'I must repent. I must stop what I have been doing and I must tell others that it is wrong too.' Shortly after the training, he asked me to come to do the same training in The Heart of the Matter with his churches in the villages, where the

problem of child witch accusations is particularly prevalent. Many of the children who are on the streets of Goma are there because of accusations of witchcraft made against them in the villages. He is now a passionate advocate for children and the training is due to happen soon.” [Source: G09bKB]

“A boy of around 15 lived with his older brother and the brother’s wife. The older brother asked me to go to the house because the younger brother was a witch and he did not know what to do. When I went to the house, I asked why he believed the younger brother was a witch, as he said there had been no problems between them. He said that a ‘prophet’ had said that the younger brother was a witch. Using the teaching of The Heart of the Matter, I showed him that this was not the case. The wife said that they had been living in harmony before [the prophet’s accusation], and now they are continuing to do so.” [Source: G09bKB]

“After the training on The Heart of the Matter, I was able to help a family. This family has many members, and four months ago, the head of the family died, and this was followed by four accidents to other members of the family. The death of the head of the family and the accidents led the family to believe that their misfortune was being caused by witchcraft. The family looked for the source of the witchcraft, and they concluded that one of the children in the family wanted to exterminate the whole family through witchcraft. The whole family was ready to burn the child, because they had taken him to many prayer and deliverance rooms and he had refused to admit that he was a witch and [they believed] that he wanted to do whatever it took to exterminate the whole family. When I heard about this, I spoke to each member of the family in turn and I showed that the child was innocent and that there was no way he could try to ‘eat’ the whole family. Finally, I spoke to the child, who told me after several conversations that all the adults in the family hated him and that he was whipped night and day, and that as a result, he was excluded from the family, and they began to accuse him of being a witch. I involved a few others, who helped me to teach the family of this child until they were able to recognise that what they were doing was wrong. We were able to create a new harmony with this family, and now peace reigns there. The boy is at school and the adults have changed the way they behave towards all the children in the extended family.” [Source: G10bKN]

[Ed:] As an indirect benefit, the training has improved attitudes towards children, even where no accusations are being made: “There were children who sang in the church choir but the woman who led it did not care for them, and constantly mocked them, so the children stopped coming to the choir. This bothered me a lot because the training had taught me that children should be at the heart of the church and that they should be treated with love and respect. The woman concerned actually left and I have begun to lead the choir and to try to treat them well. The children have returned and say that they feel free to sing.” [Source: G03QZ]

LUBUMBASHI, D.R.CONGO

“In my family, there was a cousin who wet the bed up to the age of 16, and as she was unruly, people thought she might be a witch. Or that she was possessed by an evil spirit, but after the training, I realised it might be because of an illness.” [Source: L02NN]

“The greatest testimony I have is from within my family. My second child was not able to write at school from nursery class to the second year of primary school. In the first year of primary school, the child was failing so badly that I thought it would be a good idea to have a tutor at home. He began his lessons but during the year, the tutor stopped because he said the child’s level of attainment was too low. I went back to his school teacher, who was also trying to raise his level a little. This made the child start to become discouraged and lacking in self-esteem because he saw he was the weakest among his peer group at school and even in the family. I even said to myself that he was bewitched. But what made me unsure of this was that every time he went to church he could recount to me in the evening all the lessons or themes from Sunday school. After the [Heart of the Matter] training, I had the courage to pray and fast that God would renew his intelligence. I ignored all his weaknesses and started to encourage him and treat him like his brothers. I used to hit him a lot but I stopped doing this and I thank God that as I tell you this, he is able to read and write himself, and he can even do his homework without me. I love it when he says to me ‘Mum, you are my princess’. He has seen the change in me.” [Source: L02NN]

“We have the story of a child called Oshin who was accused of witchcraft because of the death of his father. The child was thrown out and abandoned by his family. We went to see his family around three times. Nobody wanted to see the child and we were even severely threatened by the uncles who accused him of being a

witch. After some time, as we taught them, Oshin's family were willing to share with us and with the child. Sometimes, the child visits them and they welcome him with great joy. Up to now, the child has been living at the Children's Centre. Given the current atmosphere between us and the family, we anticipate being able to reintegrate the child with them in the near future." [Source: L03RN]

"We have the case of a child called Estiven who is 14 years old. This child lives at the Children's Centre. He was living on the streets following a false accusation of witchcraft made by his own parents, because he was showing so-called 'signs' of witchcraft such as wetting the bed, violent behaviour, and stealing money. After listening to the child, we went to visit the family to mediate with the parents with a view to reintegrating him. During the visit, the parents repeated forcefully their accusation, rejecting their responsibilities for the child. Given the parents' attitude, we felt it best to return with the child to the Transit Centre for his safety and protection. After the knowledge gained through the training on keeping children safe, we went back to see the family. We invited the parents, their church leaders, and a few community members. We talked together and showed the importance and the place of the child within the family, in the church and in the community. This re-awoke their conscience and their sense of responsibility towards the child, because it was based both on bible verses and on the child protection laws of our nation. As we speak, the child is with his parents, attending church and school, and playing a useful role in the community." [Source: L04LP]

"There is the case of Noemi, a girl in my community who was living with her older brother following the death of her parents. Her sister-in-law could not stand her because of what she considered to be her bad behaviour (greediness, moodiness, and bed-wetting). Her bad behaviour was attributed to witchcraft and as a consequence, the child Noemi was rejected by her biological family and her community and lived on the streets. After the training, I set myself the task of reconciling the child with her older brother and reintegrating her into the community. After a lot of discussion and mediation between me and them, the older brother and his wife decided to take her back in and live with her in an atmosphere of peace, encouraging and advising her from time to time." [Source: L09CD]

[Ed:] Often the national law on making accusations is ineffective, as it is not enforced at the local level. Here is one story to the contrary: "There was a father called Zadok who had two wives. The first wife kept miscarrying. The second gave birth successfully and insulted the first wife that she was a witch because she kept having miscarriages. When the husband learnt of this, he did some research and found out that his first wife was sick. Then the first wife reported the second wife to the authorities and she had to spend a lot of money for her release. This proves for me that accusations are punishable by the State." [Source: L06UU]

LOMÉ, TOGO

"I was at home when a lady came to me to discreetly inform me that her neighbour was in the habit of hitting and abusing her younger sister because she had a difficult nature and because despite her age (8 years old) she wet the bed at night. She said that the little sister was possessed. The thing that prompted the neighbour to come and see me was that the previous night, the child was prevented by the sister from sleeping in the house. The previous day the child had been sent out to buy something but she had lost the money. The older sister drove her from the house and told her not to come back until she had found the money. This meant that the child had spent the night outside. After the woman had left, as I live in the same area and know the sister who was mistreating the child, I met with her and her husband to explain to them what could be causing the child's difficult behaviour and the fact that she was wetting the bed at night. I helped them to understand that this had nothing to do with the demonic or with witchcraft. They seemed to understand and to accept my explanations. But after I left, the abuse continued, so I had to report it to social services who removed her from the abusive relations. The latest news is that the child is being cared for in the village and is continuing her studies without any problems." [Source: Y02ZQ]

"One day, I was at home getting ready to go out when a woman came to my door. She comes from the same neighbourhood as I, but we don't really know each other. She said to me "I have heard that you care a lot about children and that you are a champion of child protection. For days, my housemate has done nothing but abuse the child of her spouse who lives with her in the house. She hits the child, makes him work until late in the evening, and refuses to give him anything to eat, claiming that the child is stubborn, has a difficult nature and is disobedient. If she finds out someone has given food to the child she hurls insults, calls them names and curses them. So people feed the child in secret. This morning she beat the child savagely again and I can't stand it.

That's why I have come to you to see if you can do something to help the child." After the woman left, I went out and by chance, I bumped into the child fetching water, while crying. When I asked him why his stepmother beat him, he could not speak. When he opened his mouth, no words came out. I left him. I met up with the child's father who was also often both a witness to and a party to this abuse and I explained to him from what I had learned in this training what were the probable causes of the child's so-called bad behaviour. The module on childhood development and the impact of trauma helped me a lot. But my advice and my pleas to stop the abuse fell on deaf ears. The abuse continued so two days later, I called the government child protection service. They summoned the father. After talking to the child protection service, the child asked to be placed with his aunt. This happened and he is now living with her and going to school." [Source: Y04FB]

Note: in all accounts the names have been changed to protect anonymity.

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