



GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

PILOT OF LOCAL TRAINING WORKSHOPS – SEEKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

a report by the **Stop Child Witch Accusations** coalition

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So why don't you simply confess to God? Say, "I sinned, but I'll sin no more. Teach me to see what I still don't see. Whatever evil I've done, I'll do it no more." ... You choose. I can't do it for you. Tell me what you decide.

Young Elihu in the book of Job 34: 31–33, the Message

Stop Child Witch Accusations (SCWA) is an alliance of individuals and agencies responding to the reality of children experiencing serious harm or the threat of harm due to accusations of witchcraft.

Coalition members

The Bethany Children's Trust enables and equips churches and communities in Africa and beyond to respond to the needs of marginalised children, to address beliefs, practices and circumstances that cause children harm, and to create environments where they can flourish.

Mission Enfant pour Christ International equip and enable Christians in Togo to reach out to children, particularly those most vulnerable, and to serve them in Jesus' name through ministry for children in prison, affected by disability, or through football ministry.

Amor Europe / Global Youth Development exists to empower youth workers and children's leaders in many locations around the world to see children transformed through the love of Jesus Christ.

thirtyone:eight (formerly CCPAS) is the only independent Christian charity in the UK providing professional advice, support, training and resources in all areas of safeguarding children, vulnerable adults, and for those affected by abuse.

The Bible Society is working in over 200 countries, to bring the Bible to life, advocate for its place in society, and help people relate to and make sense of it in their everyday lives, always pursuing our conviction that when people engage with the Bible, lives can change for good.

We also have some **independent consultants** on the Steering Committee.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Witchcraft accusations against children have been on the increase over the last 25 years in many locations worldwide. These children are stigmatised, subject to horrific abuse, experience severe psychological trauma, and are socially ostracised. Such abuse is often seen as legitimate in locations where witchcraft beliefs and practices are common and entrenched.

SCWA has been working with local NGOs and churches, particularly in the D.R. Congo and Togo, to respond to this issue. Research to identify root causes was initiated through **Focus Groups** in several locations. These were followed up by **Action Forums**, exploring the key themes with church leaders and others through theologically informed reflection and dialogue. From the learning outcomes of these two initiatives, we then developed a resource for use in **Local Workshops**.

Entitled *The Heart of the Matter*, this interactive training material fosters cultural critique and affirmative engagement around seven topics, namely: • **welcoming children as a gift of God**, • **accepting personal responsibility** for decisions and actions, • **understanding child development** and trauma, • **acknowledging God's sovereignty**, • **identifying the role of pastors**, • **appreciating how the community can help** to protect children, and • **applying the law** to advocate for children's welfare. Each topic seeks to address one of the underlying beliefs or root causes.

Pilot Workshops

Four localities were selected to pilot this resource.

Lomé, Togo: In a nation somewhat lacking infrastructure and development, and where half the population are children, complex multi-layered belief systems (traditional tribal, world religions, and modern sects) all vie for prominence. There are some established Christian churches, as well as many more recent independent congregations. Children generally are not esteemed as of value, excepting perhaps their contribution to the family economy. Common step-family situations are an added risk factor.

Our partner organisation was MECI, who train pastors and children's workers, and there were 20 participants at the workshop, including leaders from the Pentecostal churches.

Kananga, D.R. Congo: An explosion of violence since August 2016 has seriously destabilised the predominantly rural Kasai province, with many uprooted by the army and local militias. Accusations of witchcraft made against children are common.

Our partner organisation was the Presbyterian Church, and there were 12 participants.

Goma, D.R. Congo: A city on the eastern border with Rwanda, also struggling with refugees and internally displaced people due to historic local conflicts. Many children are on the streets as a result of abuse related to witchcraft beliefs and accusations.

Our partner organisation was LVLE, a new agency responding to the needs of street-living and other vulnerable children. The workshop had 17 participants attending.

Lubumbashi, D.R. Congo: In the south-eastern corner of the D.R.C. and despite significant mineral wealth, poverty here is rife, and family breakdown adds to the risks children face.

Our partner organisation was Kimbilio, an organisation working with street-living children, and there were 30 workshop participants.

All of the pilot workshops were run (over four or five days) through these local churches or Christian organisations, using an intentional stepwise and non-confrontational approach with church leaders and others of influence in their communities. Each day builds upon the learning of the previous days, with a primary aim to create a shift in attitudes and challenge practice in respect of the treatment of children, even if there is no significant change to beliefs about witchcraft. The latter is addressed more indirectly in the course.

Despite some significant challenges, facilitators from all four pilot workshops reported good engagement from participants and a high level of interaction with the activities and group discussion. Responses from participants and facilitators exceeded expectations, and indicate a positive shift in people's perceptions and intentions around this issue. This is clearly evidenced in responses to the questionnaires, in the module evaluation comments, and in participants' personal testimonies. The overall impact, even at this pilot phase, seems extremely positive. The training material has since been honed in the light of insights gained, and is now published.

Fresh Perspectives

Key lessons we have learned through the pilots are: that • **it is possible to address the issue** of child witch accusations respectfully but effectively, and • **practical responses are particularly helpful** for participants. For engaging with church leaders, • **an informed theological grounding is accepted as authoritative**, and so • **it is also beneficial for theology students** and pastors-in-training, but we've observed that • **this approach seems to be effective with some secular leaders** (civic authorities), too.

As designed, • **the course material works on a stand-alone basis** with a competent facilitator. Certainly, some • **contextualisation is vital**, but the resource appears to have resonance in different contexts, where always • **it is essential to acknowledge and address local realities** and the prevailing worldview.

Further learning points are: that • **it is important to clarify terminology**, especially where local languages may have many other words and meanings. We keep • **child protection as an important focus**. And finally, • **participants need material to pass on** and share with others.

For our next steps, SCWA will continue to link with its partners in both Togo and the D.R. Congo who are serving the communities where the pilot training took place. Partner organisations intend to run more local workshops using the published training course material, possibly introducing it into new locations affected by this issue. Hope arises that this will see more attitudes and practices changed, and ultimately reduce accusations and abuse of children in these churches and communities.

Concluding

While hesitating to draw deep conclusions from the limited pilot phase, initial outcomes indicate that an approach such as this can indeed bring about a change in attitude and practice in respect of the treatment of children who may be suspected or accused due to beliefs in witchcraft.

SCWA will continue to collaborate with local agencies in these and in new localities, seeking to hone a contextually nuanced approach to intervention and engagement. Our aim is for a ***Model of Change*** that can be sustained and replicated, and which brings about a measurable positive outcome.

Our course entitled ***The Heart of the Matter*** is now a key element in our approach. We are keen for others to use this resource, experiment with it, and so help to reduce the incidence of children being abandoned, abused, or tortured, as a result of witchcraft beliefs and accusations.



GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

BROAD CONTEXT

Witchcraft accusations flourish in societies where there is a prevailing worldview that misfortune is caused by evil spirits who work through human agents. It is thought that these persons, so-called “witches”, operate in secret mainly at night, and use their innate malevolent powers to harm others. Historically, such accusations have been made against vulnerable members of society, particularly widows and elderly men. But over the last 25 years there has been a significant rising trend in accusations made against children. The beliefs that underpin these accusations are deeply embedded in many societies.

Several factors may exacerbate this situation: political instability, economic insecurity, rapid urbanisation, labour migration, all contribute to social stresses and breakdown of traditional extended family support networks. New empowerment of young people also encourages increasingly negative attitudes towards children.¹

How big is the problem? The scale of the phenomenon has not been definitively established, but in 2006 Human Rights Watch estimated some 30,000 children were living on the streets of Kinshasa, capital city of D.R. Congo, some 70 percent of whom were there as a direct result of witchcraft accusations,² a statistic later reinforced in 2009 and 2010 by research for UN agencies.^{3,4} Anecdotal evidence indicates that many tens of thousands more children may be affected by this worldwide.

Children accused of witchcraft are stigmatised, ostracised, tortured, and even murdered. The harm caused by witchcraft accusations is broad and deep, severely impacting a child’s development. It affects a child’s physical wellbeing, mental and emotional health, social interactions, and spiritual life. But such abuse is increasingly perceived as normal and legitimate in countries where witchcraft related beliefs and practices are common and entrenched.

SCWA BACKGROUND

While accusations of witchcraft against children are a global phenomenon, SCWA’s work to date has been primarily focused on sub-Saharan African nations, where there are epicenters of this form of abuse. In several places SCWA’s member agencies have established relationships with theologians, churches, local NGOs, and mainstream organisations that are seeking to respond to the issue.

In both the D.R. Congo and in Togo our first point of engagement was to initiate research through extensive **Focus Groups** in affected localities. In the D.R.C. these focus groups included children, and parents or guardians, in and around the capital, Kinshasa. In Togo, some 25 focus groups were held including more than 200 adults and young people from Christian, Muslim, and Animist traditions. This research enabled us to gain insight into the realities of what is occurring, and the help identify root causes.

Our next step has been to run **Action Forums**, one in Kinshasa, D.R. Congo (August 2014), and one in Lomé, Togo (November 2016). Drawing on the research outcomes, the focus of each forum is tailored by selecting key topics. We then purposefully engage church leaders and others to examine beliefs and practices in the light of theologically informed and guided biblical reflection. This process has helped to open up the issue, and has provided the impetus to develop some practical resources for use in churches and communities.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

In response to the learning and key issues identified during the first two phases, an outline of training material for use in **Local Workshops** was formulated, and then honed into a contextualized, research-based resource. This seeks to respond to the root causes of witchcraft accusations made against children, helping church leaders and workers to keep children safe from harm in the church and the local community.

The Heart of the Matter

Entitled *The Heart of the Matter*, the resource consists of seven carefully crafted modules, each addressing one key topic identified and actively engaging participants in a theologically informed exploration, to enable participants to examine their own attitudes and practices in the light of biblical models and standards.

In this way, local cultural beliefs are not confronted by values imported from another external culture. Instead, participants are encouraged to reflectively critique their own culture in the light of the values of their own faith, maturely held.

Seven Key Themes

The seven key areas addressed by *The Heart of the Matter* are as follows:

- **welcoming all children** as a gift of God, needing to be cherished and nurtured – seeking to address the undervaluing of children as human beings;
- **accepting personal responsibility** for our own decisions and actions – seeking to question and challenge the culture of blaming others around us for what happens in life;
- **recognising normal child development** and the **impact of trauma** on children – seeking to improve understanding of mental and emotional issues (including such as nightmares, bed-wetting, and traumatised behaviour), which have been used as so-called ‘signs’ to accuse young children of witchcraft;
- **acknowledging the sovereignty of God** over the life of the Christian believer – seeking to alleviate the sense of living in constant heightened fear of malevolent spiritual powers;
- **identifying the role of pastors** in practical responses – seeking to enhance wise leadership in countering accusations against children, and preventing harm;

- **appreciating the community's role** in protecting children from accusations and abuse —seeking to encourage collective responsibility to look out for children's wellbeing;
- **applying the law** to advocate for children's welfare and to uphold their legal rights — seeking to inform and empower participants to speak out on this issue.

Each module of the course uses a variety of interactive activities to encourage exploration, dialogue, and practical engagement with the issues.

The Heart of the Matter has now been published by SCWA in French and in English, and will be made available via our online resource hub:

« stop-cwa.org/resources »



The Committee remains concerned that a large number of children are labeled as witches and consequently suffer serious stigmatization. The Committee is also concerned that violence against children accused of witchcraft is increasing, and that children are being kept as prisoners in religious buildings where they are exposed to torture and ill-treatment or even killed under the pretext of exorcism.

UN CRC, Concluding Observations: D.R. Congo, 2009

RUNNING THE PILOT WORKSHOPS

SELECTED LOCALITIES

Four pilot localities were selected, one in Togo and three in the D.R. Congo, giving a diversity of environments, rural versus urban, instability versus relatively stable, remote versus more easily accessible.

Lomé, Togo

As a nation, Togo is ranked among the poorest worldwide. It has a relatively small land size and population, about half of whom are children. Lomé, the capital city, is growing with many people looking to move there for opportunities to study or to work. Infrastructure investment that benefits the capital is not seen in the majority of the country, which is more rural and isolated from development.

Belief systems are complex and multi-layered, often expressed with a strong hierarchy. Many believe in ancestor worship and animism, sometimes in combination with other faiths or religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Voodoo, or sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses, for example. The impact of such beliefs can result in harm, especially to children and women. It is not uncommon to hear of a child being left at a shrine as an appeasement, or else of a child with disability being revered for their powers in some communities while being hidden with shame in others. Explanation of many of life's difficulties favours a spiritual understanding in preference to a more scientific rationale.

Nationally, the Christian church is represented by some well-established and widely-recognised denominations, both Protestant and Catholic. There are also a large number of independent churches, where belief and doctrine vary, perhaps based on the interpretation of the church leader, who may not have received any formal theological training. Churches often display a strongly tiered structure and people from some parts of the community may not be welcome. Church leaders are often directly dependent on the giving from church members for their livelihood.

Children are generally considered (both in society and in the church) to have less value than adults, making less contribution to society. However, many children work to support the family economy, and all children work to support the household functioning. Parenting is affected by the need to earn money from labour intensive tasks, and fathers are often absent or distant in raising children. Polygamy and children being raised by extended family members is common enough to be an identified risk for child safeguarding, since some children may have less status in the household where they live than other children, which may result in harm or more overt abuse.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The D.R. Congo is the size of Western Europe with a population of some 83 million people. It is a beautiful and resource-rich country, but its infrastructure and economy have been

damaged by years of dictatorship, civil war and ethnic conflicts, and violence is a daily reality for many Congolese. There has never been a peaceful transition of power since the nation won its independence in 1960. In the current political climate elections have been severely delayed. This, in addition to power vacuums caused by the country's instability and local rivalries, has caused an escalation in unrest and violent conflicts in various regions, most notably Kasai and Nord Kivu, along with crackdowns and curfews in the capital, Kinshasa.

There is a blending of worldviews and syncretism of Christianity with traditional beliefs and practices. Many church leaders have no formal training, but they have considerable local influence. Profit and status are both on offer for self-proclaimed prophets and healers who perform elaborate deliverance and other rituals. Marital breakdown, often exacerbated by poverty, is common, as are blended families. Children are also frequently placed with members of their extended family, often for financial reasons. Schooling is available only to those with adequate means, and many children are required from a relatively early age to contribute to the household, either economically or by taking responsibility for the care of younger siblings.

Kananga, D.R. Congo

Since August 2016, there has been an explosion of violence in Kasai province, a predominantly rural area where poverty is widespread. Militia attacks and army reprisals have uprooted some 1.4 million people in this previously relatively stable region of the D.R. Congo. The conflict has contributed to doubling the number of displaced people in the country within a year. The Catholic Church reports killings of over 3000, amid UN reports of mass graves and widespread abuse of civilians, some of which is attributed to so-called "child witches". Accusations of witchcraft made against children are common in Kasai.

Goma, D.R. Congo

Goma is a city on the eastern border of the D.R. Congo, and the capital of North Kivu province. It has been at the centre of the nation's unrest over the past two decades and more, including the influx of refugees following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and several regional conflicts between government forces and rebel groups. Children have been recruited by rebel groups to commit unspeakable atrocities. Tens of thousands of people in eastern D.R.C. have been internally displaced due to these conflicts. As a result of this continued unrest, the city is struggling in terms of education, employment, health, infrastructure, and security.

It is against this backdrop that the pervasive belief in witchcraft plays a role in the life of the city. Children are accused of bringing misfortune to their families and – considering the hardships faced by most families in Goma – such accusations are common. As a result, children are abused through 'exorcism' rites, ostracised from their families, and thrown out of their homes to live on the streets.

Lubumbashi, D.R. Congo

Lubumbashi is D.R. Congo's second city, with a population of around 1.8 million. It is found in the south-eastern corner of the country, in Haut-Katanga Province, near the border with

Zambia. It is the mining capital of the Congo, acting as a hub for many mining companies, and produces half the world's cobalt, much of it mined by hand and by children. Despite the mineral wealth of the area, the city faces numerous economic and social challenges, not least the fact that more than 60% of the population is under 20 years old and many have dropped out of school because they are unable to afford the uniform and other costs. Poverty and family breakdown, often exacerbated by witchcraft accusations, are among the reasons why large numbers of children and young people crowd the streets of Lubumbashi, with market stalls and cardboard boxes as their only shelter. Interviews with street children suggest that more than half of them have experienced some form of torture.⁵

INTENTIONAL APPROACH

Key to an effective approach was to intentionally engage directly with local churches, anticipating that the benefits potentially could (and would) cascade into the immediate community.

Church Leaders

In many places churches and pastors have been complicit with accusations against children. Sometimes, it would appear this has been for financial gain in carrying out so-called exorcisms, sometimes to acquire status for the leader. Equally, church leaders may be involved simply through a lack of theological understanding, an overly syncretistic worldview, and ignorance of the negative consequences for the child and family.

But it is precisely because of this powerful influence within the community that church pastors and leaders are vital in changing people's understanding. If leaders of church congregations can teach and model good practice, then this can potentially reach wider communities through their social connections.

Hence all of the pilot workshops were run through local churches or Christian organisations.

Non-Confrontational

A stepwise, non-confrontational method is employed in the training material, moving participants on from their original thinking to new understandings, especially about acceptance of children, and the need to protect them from abuse. Each day builds upon the

Quotes from Participants

"Societal customs influenced my Christian faith to the point that I was among those who stubbornly supported witchcraft accusations against children. I need to change."

.....

"We are guilty of many cases of destroying children's lives. We have considered the child as a good-for-nothing, as useless and burdensome. We need to be ashamed."

.....

"I must start to consider children as being lovable and important in the eyes of God."

learning of the previous days, hence the workshop runs over four or five days, ideally consecutively.

A primary aim is to create a shift in attitudes and challenge practice in respect of the treatment of children, even if there is no significant change to beliefs about witchcraft. The latter is addressed more indirectly in the course.

PILOT WORKSHOPS

The Heart of the Matter was piloted in the four selected locations with the help of organisations or groups with whom SCWA has links.

Lomé, Togo

Pilot Partner and Participants: the Lomé pilot was run by MECI,⁶ who train pastors and children's workers, in mid-July 2017. There were twenty participants, of whom two were women and eighteen were men. These comprised youth leaders, pastors, children's ministry leaders, and other church leaders, primarily from the Pentecostal Church of Togo. Some had attended the earlier Action Forum in Lomé, but most are described as "very much in the dark on the topic" and wanting to find out more. Eighteen of the participants were aged between 26 and 50 years old, with two being 51 or over. None were under 26.

Due to time constraints the final Module was deferred until February 2018. The focus of this module is on legal advocacy and children's rights, and thirteen of the participants attended.

Kananga, D.R. Congo

Pilot Partner and Participants: the Kasai pilot was run by members of the Presbyterian Church in Kasai (and despite the volatile political situation) at the end of June 2017, involving twelve participants, seven of whom were men and five women. They represented Presbyterian, Reformed and Revivalist churches, plus two lawyers, two women's leaders, two managers from organisations caring for orphans and vulnerable children, one health and one education official, one representative from social services, and one delegate from UNICEF. Age breakdown for

Testimony of Pastor Delphin Tshimuanga

Delphin is now an adult and a pastor of a church. He reported having been accused of witchcraft when he was just nine years old. His mother had died, and after his father remarried, his step-mother accused him of witchcraft.

“She told my father she had dreamed that I was strangling her children and feeding them human flesh,” he recalled. His father beat him, gave him just one meal a day and forced him to sleep separately from the family, referring to him as ‘witch’...

“I was the victim of things I did not understand.”

He ended up living on the streets.

these participants is not recorded, but likely to mirror that of the other pilots. The facilitators did not indicate whether there was a prior relationship with any of the participants.

Goma, D.R. Congo

Pilot Partner and Participants: the Goma pilot took place in early August 2017, and was run by LVLE,⁷ a newly formed organisation which has been created in response to the needs of street-living and other vulnerable children in Goma. The pilot involved seventeen participants, namely, six women and eleven men. These represented Catholic, Protestant and Revivalist churches and many were specifically involved in children's work in their respective denominations. Of the participants most were aged between 26 and 50, with just two between 18 and 25, and two who were 51 or over. All of them were known contacts of the facilitators, with friendly relationships based on ministry. None had received prior training on child witch accusations.

Lubumbashi, D.R. Congo

Pilot Partner and Participants: the Lubumbashi pilot took place in mid-November 2017 and was delivered by Kimbilio,⁸ an organisation working with street-living children. There were thirty participants, of which four were women and twenty-six were men. Two were Anglican Archdeacons, one was an Anglican Sunday school teacher, three were pastors of different churches, eight were Kimbilio staff members, three were delegates from the Ministry of Social Affairs, and twelve (at the request of the Anglican bishop) were students from an Anglican theological seminary. One was aged between 18 and 25, there were twenty-five aged 26 to 50, and four were 51 or over. Apart from the seminary students, most of the participants were known to the hosts of the workshop.



DRAWING FRESH PERSPECTIVE

IMPACT AND CHALLENGES

The facilitators from all four pilot workshops reported good engagement from participants and a high level of interaction with the activities and group discussion. Responses from participants and facilitators exceeded expectations, and indicate a positive shift in people's perceptions and intentions around this issue.

However, there were some significant challenges...

- **time commitment:** five full days has proved a demanding schedule, difficult to achieve, with three locations running the workshops over four days, which proved insufficient. Consequently, one of these deferred a full module, and another deferred the final personal response activity.
- **complexity of issues:** some aspects of the topics have proven harder to communicate as some of the concepts and terminology used were not immediately familiar to the participants. Interpreting these ideas and meanings to make sense in the local language brings an added challenge.

Since the pilot workshops, and in the light of the facilitators' recommendations, modules 4 and 7 have been substantially revised to bring greater clarity, to simplify the focus, and to shorten the time required to cover the topics. Other modules have had revisions to avoid ambiguity or misunderstanding, and to clarify unfamiliar terminology. In most cases these are now slimmer in content. It is hoped these changes will improve engagement with complex topics, and also reduce the time pressure for completing the course.

- **language spoken:** the course material is in the participants' second language (French)⁹ though in all the workshops they were free to discuss in groups and in plenary in whichever language they were most at ease. Facilitators needed a good grasp of French and the ability to interpret questions into the local language, if required. All of the pilot facilitators are known to have met this requirement.

However, a specific request was raised to have the material available in Kiswahili and Lingala. We are now pursuing this.

Also, in the revised published edition, the assessment of effectiveness of the pilots has been replaced by a simpler ongoing evaluation process, to encourage those who use the resource to try to make a longer-term measure of the impact on beliefs and practice.

Overall Impact

All five pilot workshops reported changed thinking in the majority of the participants, often to a very significant degree. This is clearly evidenced in responses to the questionnaires, in the module evaluation comments, and in participants' personal testimonies.

Local Outcomes

Lomé, Togo

Initial Outcomes: Following the Lomé training workshop...

- 100 percent of this group made positive statements about the need to love, protect and value children;
- more than 50 percent made commitments to positive personal action;
- 50 percent rejected any connection between children's behaviour and witchcraft;
- in particular, there was a strong acceptance of the value and worth of children with disabilities, in contrast to previous rejection of them as witches;
- 90 percent asserted the omnipotence of God, and one third of participants said that they no longer needed to live in fear.

Facilitators have stated that even where some beliefs remain unchanged, "they are now, however, against all abuse of vulnerable people, especially of children accused of witchcraft".

Kananga, D.R. Congo

Prior to the Workshop: The Kasai participants reported regular occurrences of accusations against children, and the difficulties associated with being asked to affirm suspicions of a parent or other person that a particular child was a witch. In particular, they were concerned that if a church leader did not perform some ritual to 'exorcise' the child, it was likely that the child would be taken to another 'prophet' or 'pastor' who might do so with extreme violence.

Initial Outcomes: Following the workshop in Kananga, Kasai province...

- two thirds of participants said that they had changed their thinking, committed to different behaviour personally, or to bringing about societal change;
- almost all of the rest (25%) made a positive statement in line with the training's objectives, though it's not clear if this was new or changed thinking;
- over 60% percent said that, because of God's omnipotence, they no longer needed to live in fear.

More Quotes

"A member of my church brought their child to me for prayer. He was accused of being a witch. After talking with them, I found that the child's difficult behaviour was no more than the result of hunger and malnutrition. I advised the father to feed the child well and to stop threatening him. Once this happened, the so-called signs of witchcraft disappeared."

.....

"As a community, and especially as the church, we must take responsibility for children."

After the Workshop: Participants set up a working group at the end of the training, meeting monthly to plan and follow up activities. They have requested additional teaching resources from the Action Forums to take back to their churches and communities.

José Muntu's Testimony

José Muntu is from Kasai in D.R. Congo, a development officer, father of two children, who participated in the Kasai pilot. He says:

“In the past, I had a wrong understanding of children's behaviour, which extended to making accusations that children were bewitched because of their difficult actions. I was afraid of witchcraft and always thought my difficult situation or suffering had a supernatural cause. I could not imagine for a single moment that I could overcome the problem without making an accusation. I had no idea of the laws that protect children; and I thought that each parent was responsible for his or her child and that this was no business of the community or the church.

“My participation in this workshop has given me the chance above all to be a good father and husband to my children and my wife, and to give the children in our community and church the opportunity to flourish and to serve our society after us. I should no longer fear witchcraft nor blame others for my situation, but on the contrary, I must make an effort and pray for help to overcome the problems that happen to me. I have committed myself to fight against accusations of witchcraft against children in our society. I will be part of the [new local] team to play my part in improving the situation for children in our region. A child is a person, a gift of God who must be cared for and protected to safeguard his or her healthy development.

“I promise that I will speak out wherever I go to stop accusations of witchcraft against children.”

Goma, D.R. Congo

Initial Outcomes: Following the training workshop held in Goma, on the eastern border...

- more than 90 percent said that they needed to change their beliefs and actions;
- 40 per cent said that they needed forgiveness for previous actions;
- more than half said that they no longer need live in fear.

Facilitators report that “hearts were touched to the extent that participants asked for a rapid spreading of these lessons in the villages where these practices are most visible”.

Lubumbashi, D.R. Congo

Initial Outcomes: after the Lubumbashi pilot workshop...

- 95 percent expressed the need for personal change;
- this group expressed a strong awareness of the positive role that the church can play in bringing change for the better.

All Pilot Locations

Participants of the pilots have requested the revised materials to enable them to pass on what they have learnt. In all four locations the groups intend to run further workshops in affected communities.

LESSONS LEARNT

Key lessons we have learned through the pilots are:

- **it is possible to address the issue** of child witch accusations respectfully, but firmly and effectively in a way that can be received in a context where such beliefs are embedded;
- **practical responses are particularly helpful** (such as: the “how do you know?” exercise; guidelines for how to pray with children; and how to respond to parents of a child accused of witchcraft), and are appreciated by participants;
- **an informed theological grounding is accepted as authoritative** for the training resource and beneficial to participants;
- **it is beneficial for theology students** and pastors-in-training, giving fresh perspective on this issue before taking up an active church leader role;
- **this approach seems to be effective with some secular leaders** (including civil servants, lawyers, educationalists, development workers, among others), even though it was specifically designed for church leaders and faith-based agencies;
- **the course material works on a stand-alone basis** without the need to train the original trainers; some experience of training is probably helpful but not essential, and participants appear to feel confident that they will be able to pass on their learning;
- **contextualisation is vital**, but the material appears to resonate across rural and urban areas of D.R. Congo and in different nations – we have run it in Togo and D.R. Congo, however, following consultation with experts in Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, and Kenya, we believe that it would be effective more broadly within the African context;
- **it is essential to acknowledge and address local realities** and the prevailing worldview, not dismiss them, particularly beliefs and experiences associated with the supernatural. We have now re-written the module on Spiritual Powers to do this more clearly in the light of learning from the pilots;

- **it is important to define, distinguish, and clarify terms** (for example: witchcraft, divination, demonic oppression), especially where local languages may have many other words and meanings. This is a complex issue, but we have now added in material to address this;
- **child protection is an important focus.** However, the original material sought to cover this broader topic quickly but comprehensively, which has proved too difficult for participants to absorb. So we have simplified the detailed material, replacing a lengthy policy and procedures with a simpler declaration and key guiding principles;
- **participants need material to pass on** in their churches and communities. This was requested by several participants. We can provide the full version, but creating summaries of key sections may also prove helpful.

NEXT STEPS

SCWA will continue to link with its partners in both Togo and the D.R. Congo who are serving the communities where the pilot training took place. Partner organisations intend to run more local workshops using the published training course material, possibly introducing it into new locations affected by this issue. Hope arises that this will see more attitudes and practices changed, and ultimately reduce accusations and abuse of children in these churches and communities.

Additional steps that SCWA are taking include:

- launching ***The Heart of the Matter*** officially at its **Collaborator Forum** in the UK, to be held in late October 2018;
- making the course freely available online via the **SCWA Resource Hub** for use by any organisation working in communities where this is a daily reality;
— « stop-cwa.org/resources »
- working with a partner agency to get the course material translated into Kiswahili and Lingala, anticipated for publication in 2019;
- presenting its ***Model of Change*** to the **UN Experts Workshop** on Witchcraft and Human Rights, which met initially in September 2017. Attended by secular and faith-based organisations, UN agency representatives, and academics working on issues related to child witch accusations, interest was shown by some attendees to receive the training for use in affected locations in Africa and Asia;
- offering its experiences at a **WHRIN Conference** on “Witchcraft Beliefs and Human Rights: Past, Present and Future Perspectives” to be hosted by Lancaster University in the UK in January 2019.

CONCLUDING

While hesitating to draw deep conclusions from the limited pilot phase, initial outcomes indicate that an approach such as this can indeed bring about a change in attitude and practice in respect of the treatment of children who may be suspected or accused due to beliefs in witchcraft.

Participants of the workshops, acting in their local churches and communities, now seem more empowered as influencers, better enabled to respond appropriately to accusations, and better equipped to work towards safeguarding the emerging generation of children. And by the mutual encouragement of working together, they can ensure that the immediate enthusiasm and energy to make a difference doesn't simply fade.

Skilled facilitators have worked intently with the material, giving an extremely positive assessment while also providing some significant enhancements. These have enabled us to smooth out potential problems in the published edition of the training resource.

SCWA will continue to collaborate with local agencies in these and in new localities, seeking to hone a contextually nuanced approach to intervention and engagement. Our aim is for a **Model of Change** that can be sustained and replicated, and which brings about a measurable positive outcome.

Our course entitled ***The Heart of the Matter*** is now a key element in our approach. We are keen for others to use this resource, experiment with it, and so help to reduce the incidence of children being abandoned, abused, or tortured, as a result of witchcraft beliefs and accusations.

How to get in touch with us

If you wish to get in touch with us directly, having read this report, then the SCWA Steering Committee can be reached as follows:

Stop Child Witch Accusations

email: info@stop-cwa.org

webform: stop-cwa.org/contact

Current Chair of the Coalition

Susie Howe

email: susieh@bethanychildrenstrust.org.uk

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ see Filip de Boeck for further analysis: Filip De Boeck, "At Risk, as Risk: Abandonment and care in a world of spiritual insecurity", p.129–147 in LaFontaine (ed), *The Devil's Children*, Ashgate Publishing, 2009
- ² Human Rights Watch, *What Future? Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Vol. 18 No. 2a, New York: Human Rights Watch, April 2006
- ³ Philip Alston, *Protection and Promotion of All Human Rights: report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to the UN General Assembly*, Geneva: Human Rights Council, May 2009
- ⁴ Aleksandra Cimpric, *Children Accused of Witchcraft: an anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa*, Dakar: UNICEF, April 2010
- ⁵ Boniface et al., *Violation of the rights of the children of the street Lubumbashi and Kipushi in the Province of Upper Katanga, Democratic Republic of the Congo*, in Open Access Library Journal, Vol. 4, e3460, 2017
- ⁶ MECI: Mission Enfant pour Christ International — « meciu.org »
- ⁷ LVLE: Laissez Vivre les Enfants
- ⁸ Kimbilio — « kimbiliocongo.org »
- ⁹ note: It is currently available in French and English

FURTHER RESOURCES

Online, our own **SCWA Resource Hub** contains a range of resources and information (in French and English) for workers engaging with those affected by witchcraft accusations against children. These includes theology papers, training materials, advocacy items, research, and more.

- link « stop-cwa.org/resources/ » and search or filter to find what you need.

For more theological insights, we recommend the **Sapientia Blog** run by the *Carl F.H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding* and hosted by the *Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*. Several posts are focused on the theme of witchcraft accusations.

- link to « henrycenter.tiu.edu/witchcraft-accusations/ » for more.

For development and advocacy insights, we highly rate the **DevPolicy Blog** hosted by the *Crawford School of Public Policy* in the *College of Asia and the Pacific* at the *Australia National Unioversity*. Two authors focus on practical engagement with this issue.

- link to « devpolicy.org/author/miranda-forsyth/ »
- and « devpolicy.org/author/philip-gibbs/ »

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