Voices of Change

Beyond Victims and Villains

Message from the Editorial Team…

Welcome to the second issue of BVV News, an occasional newsletter about the BVV programme taking place in communities across Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland. In this newsletter you will read of first hand experiences from community members describing the impact BV V has had on their lives and on the whole community.

What is BVV?
BVV stands for *Beyond Victims and Villains*. It's an audio-drama in eight episodes, covering important but often sensitive topics like violence against women, sexual violence, abuse of children, transactional sex, trans-generational sex, and how all this increases the risk of HIV infection. It also covers why some people are unable to make choices to protect themselves against HIV infection.

The audio-drama is based on evidence CIET collected from school children in South Africa in 2004, from people in households in ten Southern African countries in 2007, and from young people in Botswana, Namibia, and Swaziland in 2009. It's available in Setswana for Botswana, in SiSwati for Swazi-land, and in English, Afrikaans, Ojtiherero, Oshiwambo, Rukwangali, Damaranama, and Silozi for Namibia.

What is CIET?
CIET stands for Community Information for Empowerment and Transparency. CIET works in many countries worldwide and has been working in Southern Africa since 1996. CIET aims to collect evidence from households and communities about important problems and then, based on this evidence, to work with communities to find solutions and take actions to tackle the problems.

How does the BVV programme work?
In each community receiving the BVV programme, CIET workers train community members about how to use the BVV audio-drama materials. Usually the people who get this training are already active in their communities, especially around the problem of HIV. These trained people go through the audio-drama with groups in their own communities. These might be sports groups, church groups, women's groups, or other groups of young women, older women, young men, and older men. In each session, the group listens to an episode of the audio-drama and then discusses the issues that it covers, how these happen in their own community, and how they might take action to tackle the problems. Each group gradually works through all the episodes over a number of weeks.

In this issue:
We feature stories as narrated by individuals from different communities in the three countries. We hope you will find their stories interesting and even inspiring. To protect their privacy we have not included the names of the storytellers.

Editorial team

A cloud was removed from my eyes

Our village is so remote and we don't get enough information on issues such as, HIV and AIDS, human rights, Gender Based Violence and other social issues. My parents passed away when I was really young and my paternal grandmother raised me. She was a very bitter and abusive woman. I was beaten every single day of my life. She was such an evil woman; even my laugh would cause me a beating. I tried so hard to please but it was like the more I tried the more abusive she became. I never could understand why she did not like me and I used to think I am a bad child. So, in return I become violent to other children and no one wanted to play with me. When I got married, and had children of my own, I yelled and cursed them everyday. I was never nice to my children.

When I attended the BVV workshop in September of 2010, it was like a cloud was removed from my eyes. I was sitting there, asking myself, "what am I hearing?"" If you were abused, you don't have to become an abuser? I so much wanted to ask more but was afraid how will the other participants think of me because I know that they knew that I verbally and sometimes physically abused my children.

A few days after attending the workshop, I found myself crying uncontrollably. I felt so bad for myself and for my children. I made a conscious decision that day never to raise a hand or my voice. I did not know better but the information from the BVV really opened me up. I do not want my children to do them same to their own children; the chain broke with me. I now think that maybe my grandmother was also abused when she was a child and she did not know better.

I am lucky that I got this opportunity to receive this information. Amazingly, now I am stress free, I laugh more and my children are happy.

A woman from Namibia

I am empowered and enlightened

BVV has helped me a lot because I have been able to be a counsellor to myself in making the right decisions. Previously my life was a bit promiscuous. I would cohabit with every man I dated. After I started the BVV sessions I regained my self-esteem, and refused to be abused again. I remember making the decision not to give myself to men that did not care about me, because if they did they would suggest marriage before moving in together.

After I started the BVV sessions I regained my self-esteem…people came to me for advice.

Currently I live at home, not with any boyfriend. I have since become independent and applied to further my studies at the University of Swaziland for Adult Education of Law so that I am more equipped with Human Rights. After the BVV group was over, I started volunteering in more community activities and attending a lot of trainings dealing with HIV/AIDS.

I attended the CIET training for BVV facilitators and I volunteer in the local school. I also serve as a teacher at the community crèche. I have also been able to be part of a church group and my pastor likes my skills a lot. During conferences I am called to share my knowledge with the rest of the congregation. I have become a role model in the community. People come to me for advice.

A woman from Swaziland

How I got my family on track

Before I was involved with BVV, my relationship with my partner was a nightmare. He used to beat me badly and he drank too much. He would listen to rumours in the village about me, then he would come home drunk and verbally abuse me. Then I would get angry and tell him my mind; the minute I did that he would beat me. He wasn't taking care of the children, neglecting his duties as a father financially, and failing to build a relationship with them. They feared him like a lion.

After starting BVV, I realised that I was in an abusive relationship and that something can be done to better the situation. So I started discussing with him the topics we discussed at the sessions; he gradually started to change and stopped beating me. I too changed; to be honest the rumours that he heard circulating around the village had some truth. I did run around with other guys and I too drank a lot, sometimes I wouldn't even spend the night at home.

Now because of BVV I've stopped all that and we are still together he now takes care of our children and is good to me.

I started discussing with him the topics we discussed at the sessions….

A woman from Botswana

Community Transformations…

Positive Changes for a better life

I noticed change in the young boys and girls who attended the BVV sessions. These kids use to talk about how they will find someone who already has money to support them, especially if they end up not doing so well in school. They use to say things like "I refuse to live in poverty, like my parents", but some of them are thinking differently now, they want to do well in school so that they can be self dependant one day.

Namibia

Taking a brave step towards a better life

Most of the young people in the community were involved with much older people than them. Young boys had sugar mamas for money and young girls had sugar daddies. We were not bothered to see young boys stroll with older women, claiming that they buy alcohol for them. This is a community that over indulges in alcohol. Most of sexual transaction happens because people want to drink alcohol in return. In my own view the rate of sugar mamas amongst us young boys has decreased. After discussing with others, we agreed that it could be to two reasons (1) people realising it is bad and stop doing it completely or (2) people now regarding it is a shame and those that are still doing it, hide and no longer boast about it.

Swaziland

Moving away from a dangerous life

In all my friends that joined BVV, we have told ourselves that we will stop sleeping around and going out at night and also to encourage others to do the same and to encourage those who are abused to seek for help in the right places. The youth that we talk to show that they are listening as they don't frequent the bars or show undesirable behaviour anymore.

Botswana

Changing my attitude towards women

I value women. Not that I did not before. I value them more. My father was a very traditional and strict man. I can clearly remember, how he used to talk to my mum like she was a small kid. My mum did everything my father said, whether she agreed with it or not. My father also had many affairs and my mother knew about it but she never left him and I am sure she never confronted him. So, as a young man, I grew up not really seeing women as anything but bearers and nurturers of children.

I will respect women more…when I have children of my own I will teach them from an early age to respect women…

I learnt that women have the sane rights as us men. I now also understand that when a woman says she doesn't feel like having sex, it is not that she doesn't love me; it is just that she is not in the mood and I should respect that. More importantly, women have the right to demand use of condoms to protect themselves and I think more men should respect that, so that the deadly disease can stop.

I will respect women more and I will make sure that one day when I have children of my own I will teach them from an early age to respect women. I want to become a facilitator also, to work directly with men of my age because I know of many who think the way I used to think.

A man from Namibia

Young woman refuses old men

For me the BVV session about inter-generational sex hit home. I was standing in front of Barclays Bank at the mall just yesterday and this old man came up to me. He greeted me and I greeted him back. He then started small talk and told me how polite I was and how I should keep up that behavior/ personality. He then went on and told me how sexy and slender I was. He asked for my phone number. I refused with it. He asked for my name and I gave him a wrong name. He told me he has 3 cars and an estate. He continued on and promised to marry me and take me to places I wanted to go, I responded and told him to leave me alone as he was old enough to be my great grandfather and how I rather wanted luxuries that I have accumulated myself. I left him standing there. These "Scraps" (beat up older men) are annoying. Just the other day another one hit another car from the back as he was staring at me walking down the street.

A young woman Botswana

I changed for my children

Before I took part in the BVV, I never knew how to talk to my children well. I would scold them and assume it was my role as a parent. I would scold my children anyhow, even in front of people. After having heard the BVV sessions- I cannot recall which episodes might have talked about children and when they should start having sex- I realized that I have to hold my anger and talk properly to the children so that they can also seek advice from me about such things as starting sexual intercourse.

I remember one time, one of my daughters, was asking about a personal matter, like sanitary wear, because I made the decision to listen to my children and talk properly to them, I was able to give advice.

A woman from Swaziland

Gallary

BVV men's group in Swaziland

Facilitators training in Namibia

Facilitators training in Botswana

An Ambassador of BVV

I attended many workshops and learnt a lot about HIV and AIDS and Gender Based Violence, but never in-depth like the information I got through this intervention. I am so enlightened; how I wish I knew this 10 years ago before my husband infected me with the AIDS virus. As a woman, one never had a "voice" in marriage; whatever the husband says goes. I am not bitter and don't regret my past but I just wish I knew what I know now. However, with the information I gained through this intervention, I can comfort myself and forgive my husband. I am alive; my life is not over yet. I am applying what I have learnt by making the right decisions. I know my rights and will not allow anyone to control my life. I am worthy and love myself more.

I am not bitter and don't regret my past but I wish I knew then, what I know now…

My primary goal is too make sure that my grandchildren and other females in the family, especially the young ones, do not go through the same chaos I did. I am educating them to love and respect themselves from an early age. I educate them on their rights. And every pamphlet I get, I make sure that I share the information with them. Sexual abuse of young children is happening everyday but most kids do not know if it is abuse because no one has spoken to them about it. We are spreading the message, so that mothers, grandmothers, aunts can educate their girls about this type of abuse.

I feel so empowered and I have declared myself an ambassador of BVV. When attending weddings or any another family events, I make sure that I talk to my female family members. They always make fun of me, but I know they are listening to me because they ask questions to know more.

A woman from Namibia

Respect for Women

The first change is the respect I now have for women. I continue to be friendly with them and open with them and have no hate for them. Another change, which is the most significant one, is that before I was not of the opinion that a female may not to be in a position to have sex. I now know that, from the different answers the females in our joint BVV sessions gave. I am now able to talk openly about sex with my girlfriend and I also ask her politely to have sex with me.

My girlfriend and I were playing cards one day (4-0). I slapped her on her arm jokingly and she hit me back. I simply walked out. I recalled our BVV discussion; I remembered that hitting a woman is not a good thing so I left.

Another thing is that, to show how much I care for my girlfriend I need to help her with what she needs. Some guys in the community are keen to join the BVV discussions because of what I know.

A young man from Swaziland

BVV sessions helped improve my relationship with my girlfriend

I used to drink a lot and while under the influence I will get violent with my partner. We were staying together, she was working and I was not. Whenever she refused to give me money, I would beat her and take it by force to buy alcohol. A friend of mine told me about the BVV sessions and asked if I was interested in participating, I said yes and became a participant. These sessions made me realise that what I am doing to my partner is serious physical abuse. I felt sorry for her and started controlling my anger and drinking. I realised that all this was due to me being unemployed and I was simply trying to show my manhood. At present I am working and our relationship has improved greatly and we live peacefully together.

A man from Botswana

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