

# WORLD FAITH

## INTERFAITH YOUTH IN ACTION

### Peace and Public Health:

#### **Reducing Acceptance of Religious Violence and Raising HIV/AIDS Awareness in Malawi**

In early 2016, the youth winners of World Faith Malawi's Action Plan Competition received a small grant to conduct an HIV/AIDS awareness program, aimed at helping Malawian young people to understand both the risks of HIV/AIDS, and the government's plan to reduce HIV incidence.

In order to evaluate the efficacy of the program, we collected information about how many participants had a better understanding about HIV prevalence and prevention, and whether participation in this program, which was taught by religiously diverse instructors, helped improve impressions of religious others. Participants in three sessions were surveyed with identical questions before and after the program to evaluate if their knowledge and attitudes changed. They answered the survey using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "completely disagree" and 5 meaning "completely agree."

The results of the survey demonstrate that after the program participants had a clearer understanding of public health concerns, and a decreased tendency toward religious violence. The following key points help illustrate this result.

#### ***1. "I feel that violence against people of other faiths different than my own is acceptable"***

The data that excited us the most came from responses to whether participants thought violence against others of a religion was acceptable. Before the program, 36% responded with something other than firm disagreement.

## BEFORE

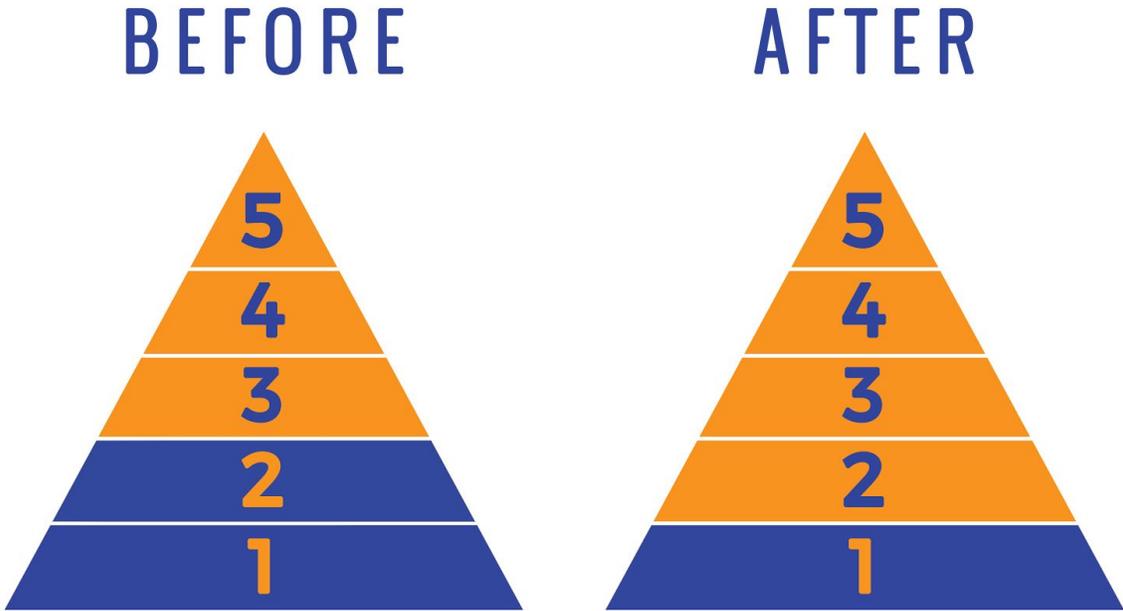


After the program, however, only .06% of participants agreed that violence against people of other faiths was acceptable. This data point is the clearest indicator that the program in Malawi reduced the likelihood of violence.



**2. “I am afraid of people from other religious traditions.”**

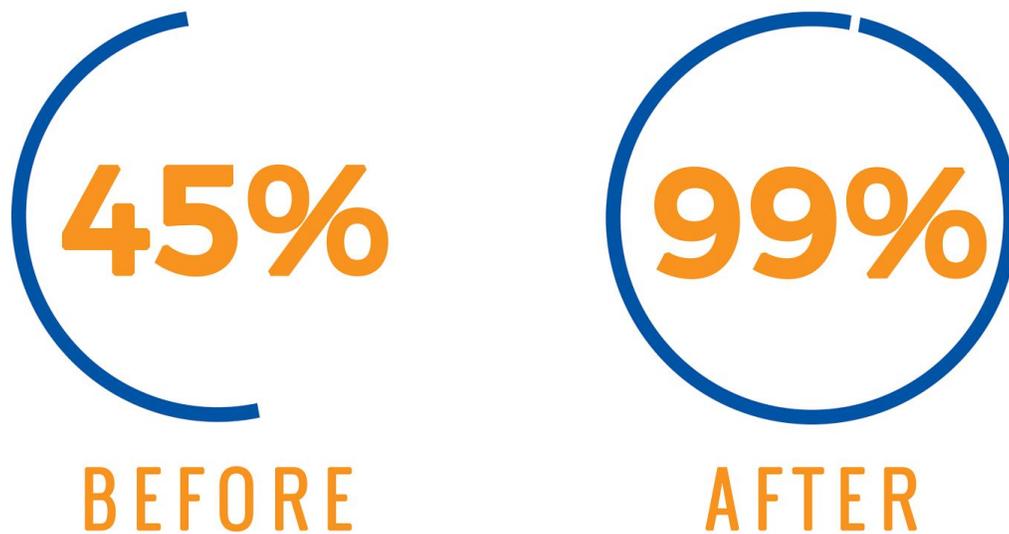
We also asked participants about their degree of fear of people from other religious traditions before the program and after the program. Before the program, participants reported comfort levels at an average score of 2.06 (on a scale from 1 to 5, with one being “completely disagree” and 5 being “completely agree”). That is, most participants reported being mildly afraid of people from other religious traditions, as displayed by Figure 2 below.



After the program, there was a 15% decrease in reported fear of people from other religious traditions.

### 3. “How many Malawian adults are currently infected with HIV?”

An important part of supporting public health is making sure community members know how to protect themselves from infectious disease. In an effort to provide the Lilongwe community with the opportunity to learn the prevalence of HIV and prevention strategies, we asked correspondents questions such as how many Malawian adults were currently infected with HIV. Before our program, 45% answered correctly. After the program, 99% correctly identified the infection rate as 15.2%.



#### ***Moving Forward***

These changes in acceptance of and comfort with people from other religious traditions is exciting progress. What’s more, it is encouraging to see results similar to those from the successful POWER program<sup>1</sup> in 2015. While our sample size for the survey was small, 162 participants, these results are indicative of what could happen in the broader community. However, our data also suggests that some of our participants might feel less willing to speak to people from other religious traditions or more afraid of visiting sacred places of other religious traditions after the program. To address the problem, in future programs, we plan to further diversify the religious background of our instructors and participants, making sure to include respected representatives of the participants’ religious communities in the planning and delivery teams.

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<sup>1</sup>[POWER Program 2015](#)