



European  
Commission



# ENGAGING WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS ON GENDER INEQUALITY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Compilation of practices **2021**





# COMPILATION OF PRACTICES

ENGAGING WITH RELIGIOUS  
ACTORS ON GENDER INEQUALITY  
AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

PUBLISHED 2021

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LEGEND  GAP III key thematic area **ENSURING FREEDOM FROM ALL FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

## MAP OF THE 5 PRACTICES



# ENGAGING STATE RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES TO ASSIST MUSLIM COUPLES IN INDONESIA<sup>1</sup>

Prevention+

<p><b>Country/countries</b> Indonesia</p> <p><b>Region</b> Asia and the Pacific</p> <p><b>Related SDGs</b></p> 	<p><b>Corresponding GAP III 2020–2025 key thematic areas of engagement</b></p> <p>Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence</p> 
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## Background

Prevention+ is a five-year, multi-country programme led by a consortium of Rutgers, Sonke Gender Justice and Promundo, and funded by the Dutch government. The programme focuses on addressing the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV), namely the social, economic, religious and cultural contexts that shape attitudes and behaviour that lead to violence. One of the countries in which this programme is being implemented, is Indonesia.

Indonesia is the country with the biggest Muslim population in the world and Muslim religious leaders play an important role in all aspects of Indonesian life. While Prevention+ Indonesia partners with a number of local women's and GBV organisations, its partnership with one specific organisation is particularly crucial to their response to the religious reality in Indonesia. This organisation, Rahima, focuses on religion and religious actors when addressing gender issues. Rahima is the technical partner for Prevention+ Indonesia, providing support to all Prevention+ Indonesia partners on how to engage with and integrate Islam into programming.

<sup>1</sup> This case study was drafted by Elisabet le Roux, with the support of Prevention+. It is part of a series of five case studies and a reflection note synthesising lessons learnt on engaging religious actors on gender-based violence. A further notable resource is a scoping note on engaging with faith-based organisations and religious actors, prepared by Marie Juul Petersen and Beatriz Sanz Corella (2020).

## Why work with religious actors?

On behalf of Prevention+ Indonesia, Rahima and another Prevention+ Indonesia partner, Rifka Annisa, did a needs assessment with religious leaders. They found that religious leaders had limited understanding about the root causes of GBV and were only addressing the symptoms. More concerning, they found that religious leaders' ideas on gender, gender roles and gender equality were quite conservative and static. However, there was also the potential that engagement with religious leaders could encourage an understanding of religious texts that are more inclusive, fair, and non-discriminating.

Based on the needs assessment, Prevention+ Indonesia decided to engage with the Office of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama/KUA). KUA is a technical executive unit of the government's Office of Religious Affairs and tasked with assisting Muslim communities with their religious affairs. KUA Heads, marriage registrars, and marriage counsellors, while working for the government, are revered as religious leaders. KUA has a number of responsibilities, but a key one is providing counselling to Muslim couples. This makes them key players in addressing GBV.



Forum on GBV Prevention

## What did they do?

The intervention aimed to build community awareness on gender equality based on Islamic values, increase the role of KUA in disseminating the values of gender equality and preventing GBV, and create collective consciousness, support, and cross-sectoral collaboration in preventing GBV.

Two of Prevention+ Indonesia's partner organisations, Rifka Annisa and Damar, have in the past worked with KUA on child marriage and domestic violence. Therefore, there were already existing relationships and trust to rely on when Rahima approached KUA.

A two-day counselling workshop was conducted with KUA Heads. For Day 1, psychologists from Rifka Annisa assisted in developing and presenting a training intended to strengthen KUA Heads' counselling skills relating to GBV. On Day 2, religious leaders, women's leaders and academics were invited to join the KUA Heads in discussing greater synergy in addressing GBV.



The workshop drew on the Islamic principle of mubadalah, a concept of reciprocity between men and women. When upholding mubadalah, mutual support, cooperation, and help amongst men and women becomes a reality. The importance of mubadalah as a guiding concept was further explored at a discussion meeting held a few months later. KUA Heads, academics, religious leaders, and civil society representatives were invited to discuss what mubadalah means in terms of justice for women. Following this, Rahima organised another workshop to discuss and disseminate the concept of mubadalah. Attended by KUA staff and women's clerics from the Fatayat organisation, discussion was held around what the concept means for violence prevention.



*Workshop Mubadalah KUA*

The KUA staff found that these workshops and meetings enriched their understanding of the relationship between men and women, leading them to understand that it should be just and equal. The KUA participants also experienced the sessions as increasing their understanding and insight of how sacred scriptures speak to gender, GBV and gender justice. Rahima is continuing their work on promoting mubadalah as an Islamic concept that is useful in countering GBV. Furthermore, through these joint meetings and workshops they are also constantly promoting dialogue between stakeholders invested in preventing violence, thus contributing to holistic prevention and response.

Rahima's work with KUA offices impacted the pre-marital and marital counselling these offices provide, especially around the principle of reciprocity. Couples interviewed as part of research conducted in 2019, found that the KUA counselling on reciprocity had helped to minimise conflict within their marriages. But KUA offices have also designed novel responses appropriate to their specific contexts. For example, some offices instituted a marital pledge, where couples at their weddings publicly commit to and sign a Reciprocity Vow. In Gisting Lampung, where there are very high rates of domestic violence, the KUA Head designed a Pledge of Anti-Domestic Violence, signed by couples at their wedding. A number of other developments have also resulted from Prevention+ Indonesia's engagement with religion and religious leaders. They have assisted in designing guidelines on GBV, to be used by KUA heads and marriage counsellors. Reading materials on gender-equal religious views have been designed and circulated and social media is being used to promote gender-equal religious values.

## Challenges – and how they responded

There is much inherent distrust of concepts such as 'gender', 'gender equality' and 'emancipation' which are seen to be 'secular' and 'Western'. Therefore Prevention+ Indonesia had to find alternative ways of approaching the issue of GBV. They used the Islamic concept of mubadalah, and the term 'reciprocity', to allow them to explain and discuss why husbands and wives have a mutual responsibility to cooperate and accommodate each other. These terms are easily accepted and allow KUA staff to engage on these issues and integrate them in carrying out their duties of providing pre-marital and marital counselling. Promoting reciprocity does, however, risk enforcing restricting gender roles and indirectly condoning gender inequality. For example, reciprocity can easily be used in support of arguments for complementarity. Care, therefore, has to be taken that the 'translation' of sensitive terms does not lead to a dilution of what the original terms actually call for. While KUA was originally tasked to provide pre-marital and marital counselling, recent legislative changes limit their role to the administrative function of registering marriages. However, in practice, KUA Heads remain very influential religious leaders within the community and people continue to approach them for pre-marital and marital counselling. Thus, even while KUA's counselling functioning is informal, Prevention+ Indonesia recognised that people turn to these leaders for advice.

Yet there are practical challenges to working with religious leaders that are part of the government. For example, KUA Heads are at times moved to new offices, meaning that the investment of knowledge and skills into KUA Heads in a specific region is 'lost'. On the other hand, this has the potential of spreading the skills and knowledge to other parts of Indonesia.





Marriage vows

## Key lessons learnt by Prevention+

- This work has illustrated the importance and impact of multi-sector partnership. Combining the expertise, experience and existing relationships of Rahima, Rifka Annisa and Damar, and the position and authority of KUA, has resulted in a programme that assisted in reaching Prevention+ Indonesia's goal of addressing GBV. None of these organisations on their own could have designed and impacted in quite such a way.
- Prevention+ Indonesia's work with KUA has highlighted the importance of involving strategic stakeholders in programme implementation. By engaging with KUA, a government institution, there is greater openness from certain government bodies to engaging with Prevention+ Indonesia and GBV forums and activities. Furthermore, by facilitating dialogue between KUA and other stakeholders, relationships and trust have formed, enabling multi-stakeholder response to GBV.



## Additional information



- [YouTube: Sonke \(2018\): The Journey of Faith](#)
- [YouTube: Rutgers Kalyana Shira Foundation \(2016\): A little piece of heaven in Bondowoso](#)
- [Prevention + brochure](#)
- [Story of transformation of a couple in Indonesia](#)
- [Rutgers landing page](#)

# INTERRELIGIOUS MOBILISATION FOR VAWG PREVENTION IN FIJI AND THE PACIFIC<sup>1</sup>

House of Sarah<sup>2</sup>

<p><b>Country/countries</b> Fiji</p> <p><b>Region</b> Asia and the Pacific</p> <p><b>Related SDGs</b></p> 	<p><b>Corresponding GAP III 2020–2025 key thematic areas of engagement</b></p> <p>Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence</p> 
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## Background

House of Sarah is a faith-based organisation in Fiji, offering a Christian network of services aimed at ending violence against women and children. This is much-needed, as Fiji has one of the highest recorded rates of VAWG globally. House of Sarah opened in 2009, supported by the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia. Over time its programming, influence and reach on faith-based approaches to prevent and respond to violence has increased. Since 2018, House of Sarah has been part of UN Women's EVAWG programme which is implemented primarily under the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership). The Pacific Partnership brings together governments, civil society organisations, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls, and increase access to quality response services for survivors. It is funded primarily by the European Union, and the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, and UN Women, and is led by the Pacific Community (SPC), UN Women and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

- <sup>1</sup> This case study was drafted by Elisabet le Roux, with the support of representatives of House of Sarah and UN Women. It is part of a series of five case studies and a reflection note synthesising lessons learnt on engaging religious actors on gender-based violence. A further notable resource is a scoping note on engaging with faith-based organisations and religious actors, prepared by Marie Juul Petersen and Beatriz Sanz Corella (2020).
- <sup>2</sup> The project's content has been produced with the financial support of the European Union and governments of Australia and New Zealand. Its contents are the sole responsibility of AUTHORS and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union, Australian Government, New Zealand Government, UN Women or any associated organisation.

## Why work with religious actors?

While Fiji is officially a secular state, the overwhelming majority of Fijians are religious and affiliate with Christianity, Hinduism or Islam. Religious leaders are very influential, impacting people's beliefs and behaviours. This is true for the entire Pacific region, and the role of religion, religious leaders and religious institutions in guiding social norms is particularly relevant to programmes that want to end VAWG. For House of Sarah, with its stated purpose of ending violence against women and children, it was thus logical to engage with religious actors.

## What did they do?

House of Sarah identified the need for a comprehensive faith-based community mobilisation intervention to prevent and respond to VAWG. Since 2013, House of Sarah working with Christian Network Talanoa (CNT) led the Break the Silence Sunday Campaign, as a Sunday on which church leaders speak in church about VAWG and the need to end it. This campaign takes place in November during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) campaign – an annual international EVAWG campaign which the Pacific observes. In 2016 the Fiji Council of Churches, with support from UN Women and House of Sarah launched the One Voice Campaign. In 2018 and 2019 House of Sarah, partnering with the Pacific Conference of Churches and UN Women, also engaged with key leaders from nine other faith organisations in Fiji in the One Voice Campaign. The One Voice Campaign is a national multi-media campaign aired during 16 Days of Activism Against GBV with Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh leaders publicly speaking out against VAWG, in videos and documentaries that aired at cinemas, on television, and circulated on social media. In 2020 on International Women's Day, the campaign expanded to include Tonga. The House of Sarah together with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) worked with the Tongan Council of Churches to make this possible. PCC is an ecumenical movement of 31 member churches and 9 councils of churches serving the people of the region.

In 2017, House of Sarah started the Preventing Violence Against Women in Fiji's Faith Settings (PVAWFFS) initiative. Identifying three Anglican parishes, it decided to adapt and implement the internationally recognised SASA! Faith approach, based on the teachings of the Bible and Qur'an, developed by Raising Voices and Trócaire. This approach is based on SASA!, which is globally recognised as one of the best practices in mobilising communities to prevent VAWG, developed by Raising Voices in Uganda. SASA! Faith is a holistic community mobilisation approach to preventing VAWG that supports communities through a comprehensive process of social change focused on transforming the unequal power dynamics between women and men, and the harmful social norms that underpin VAWG. With technical support from UN Women and Raising Voices, House of Sarah has been adapting SASA! Faith specifically for Fiji faith communities and leaders to address issues of VAWG using the language and theology of the Anglican Church.

SASA! Faith supports not only religious leaders, but everyone in the faith community on a journey of change. It is focused on nurturing, building and supporting community-led change through the grassroots activism of women, men, girls and boys, including by religious leaders within their faith communities. SASA! Faith follows a gradual, four-phase process (Start, Awareness, Support, Action), with a specific, strategic sequence, content and activities designed for each phase. This guides a faith community to effect and sustain change at both the individual and community levels ensuring sustainability and ownership. Now approximately halfway through this five-year project, women, men, girls and boys from the partner parishes have been trained to become community activists. Through monthly training and support sessions their capacity is constantly strengthened, and they carry out weekly activities in their communities.

## Challenges – and how they responded

In developing the One Voice Campaign, House of Sarah initially found it challenging to engage with and recruit religious leaders from other faiths to join the campaign. To overcome this, they turned to the Women of Faith Network, a network of women from different faiths that House of Sarah founded in 2018, for support. The Network's members committed to mobilising their respective religious leaders to participate in the campaign – and it worked. It was women who engaged with and convinced their religious leaders to engage with House of Sarah and support the One Voice Campaign.

House of Sarah's primary prevention intervention, SASA! Faith, relies heavily on community activism and its success relies on having strong, motivated community-based activists that start conversations and the social change process in their everyday lives. Volunteer Community Activists (CAs) are a crucial part of the roll-out of the community-wide programming. They engage the community from within rather than from outside, and through their everyday lives and activities rather than through large, sporadic events. With CAs being so important to the intervention, the entire endeavour is at risk should these unpaid volunteers lose interest or enthusiasm. House of Sarah ensured sustained activism by identifying and selecting (based on set criteria) the individuals who are truly committed to working for the health and well-being of their community. House of Sarah did not have to convince these individuals to take part: all of them asked to be part of the programme. By ensuring that CAs' participation is completely voluntary, they have selected individuals that are truly committed to engaging their communities for ending VAWG. After 18 months, 85% of the CAs continue voluntary activism in their communities, which evidence their dedication, and sustainability of this project.

## Key lessons learnt by House of Sarah

- Change at system and network level is best approached through individuals who, being part of the system, also own the solution and are able to advocate on a peer-to-peer level. House of Sarah has found its positive advocates to be leaders from within, who were crucial when designing initiatives and entry points. For example, to get the support and participation of the Fiji Council of Churches, they did not directly approach the Council. Rather, a church leader who is a member of the Council (in this case, the Anglican Archbishop of the Diocese of Polynesia) was the one who approached the Council and got their support.
- Recognising the influence of religion and religious leaders, the One Voice Campaign was strategic in mobilising leaders from different religions around a common cause. To be able to do that, they had to recognise the strategic role of women of faith, using the Women of Faith Network to actually get the male religious leaders on board.
- Implementing SASA! Faith in Fiji has highlighted the importance of using globally recognised approaches and adapting programming to local context, including materials used. UN Women has partnered with Raising Voices to provide House of Sarah extensive technical support in ensuring that SASA! Faith is adapted and appropriate to the Fijian culture and context. For example, Fijians must relate to faces/hair, dress, style of countryside and buildings, background, etc. of the communication materials. Other, unexpected, challenges also had to be overcome. For example, the word "sasa" has different connotations in the local language, thus it is now not used anywhere in the Fijian material.
- Community ownership and sustainability is vital. Training and engaging activists from within the respective communities enhanced acceptance and invoking community interests which contributes to progress and sustainability with a sense of ownership within these communities. In addition, empowerment of these activists enabled them to actively participate in the overall development and progress of their communities.

# MOBILISING RELIGIOUS LEADERS AS ADVOCATES FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS POLICY TRANSFORMATION IN THE SADC REGION<sup>1</sup>

SAfAIDS

## Country/countries

SADC countries (Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

## Region

Africa

## Related SDGs



## Corresponding GAP III 2020–2025 key thematic areas of engagement

Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence



Knowledge for action: The power to make a difference!

<sup>1</sup> This case study was drafted by Elisabet le Roux, in collaboration with SAfAIDS. It is part of a series of five case studies and a reflection note synthesising lessons learnt on engaging religious actors on gender-based violence. A further notable resource is a scoping note on engaging with faith-based organisations and religious actors, prepared by Marie Juul Petersen and Beatriz Sanz Corella (2020).



## Background

SAFAIDS is a regional NGO operating across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, with primary mandate of advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in synergy with promotion of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and resilience building; within communities, service provision sectors of health and education, and among leadership and policymakers.

Globally, Africa is the region with the highest number of abortion-related deaths. Unsafe abortion is one of the major contributors to the continued high regional maternal mortality and morbidity rates, with an estimated 92% of women of reproductive age in Sub-Saharan Africa living in countries with restrictive abortion laws. As of 2019, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest abortion case-fatality rate of any world region, with approximately 185 deaths per 100 000 abortions. Unsafe abortions are not only a risk to the women and adolescent girls who have them, but place a considerable strain on already overburdened public health systems. The cost of providing post-abortion care, after unsafe abortions, is vastly higher than providing all abortions safely.

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## Why work with religious actors?

SAFAIDS and its partners' collective efforts in the past 8 years have contributed to creating a SADC policy environment that enables positive SRHR outcomes. With the great majority of citizens in the 16 SADC Member States identifying with some form of religion, SAFAIDS recognises that the policy environment is heavily influenced by religion and religious actors. Religious leaders' opinions on abortion thus have a very real impact on women's and girls' rights, SRHR and specifically maternal morbidity and mortality. Recognising religious leaders' influence led to the realisation that, should they be engaged as active actors in advocacy efforts promoting safe abortion, they have the potential to significantly positively impact the preservation of lives, which would otherwise be harmed or lost due to unsafe abortion and violation of bodily autonomy and choice.

As a regional civil society organisation, SAFAIDS leverages a blend of regional, multi-country, national and local approaches to engage religious leaders in SRHR response. At national level, it collaborates with religious leader councils in each SADC country, and at regional level with faith-based organisations and religious bodies. SAFAIDS engages and consults with the most senior members of these councils and bodies, whose subsequent influence cascades to their peers. This enables a critical mass of religious leadership reached with transformative knowledge, skills and tools around SRHR, and value-shifts for preserving wellbeing, dignity and life of their congregations and society as a whole. This ultimately generates a pool of Religious Leader Champions, who further engage with policy-making structures and mechanisms, and ensure that SRHR and its intersect with women and girls' health and wellbeing are recognised within regional and national policy and frameworks.



*His Eminence Grand Mufti Assadullah Mwale of Zambia, and Her Royal Highness Princess Mihanta Ramanatsoa of the Kingdom of Linta in Madagascar; assert their Championing of gender equality, and preserving AGYW lives in the context of SRH rights, at SAFAIDS Sectoral Leadership Dialogue, March 2020. Photo by SAFAIDS.*



## What did they do?

SAFAIDS has applied its Political, Religious, Traditional, Justice and Health (PRTHJ) Sectoral Leadership Model in multiple regional programmes over the past decade, generating Religious Leader Champions who Speak-Out on SRHR, and sanction GBV and harmful religious norms and practices. An example of this engagement with religious leaders is through the Regional Transforming Lives Policy Advocacy on SRHR for Adolescents and Young People Programme, which facilitated policy reform within the SADC region. The 3 ½ year programme, supported by Sweden/Sida rolled out in 2018. Its policy advocacy actions target the regional and national policy environment, on sexual gender-based violence, early and unintended pregnancy (EUP), and unsafe abortion. A component of the Transforming Lives programme involves engaging religious leaders, using the SAFAIDS PRTHJ Model, Sectoral Leadership Policy Dialogue series and the Regional My Choice, Our Choice Campaign on ending unsafe abortions among adolescent girls and young women.

SAFAIDS established a Regional Coalition of Allies (representatives of regional CSOs and networks working with adolescents and young women [AGYW], men and boys) and Champions (highly influential individuals, e.g. Members of Parliament, traditional and religious leaders). The Allies and Champions hold positions of power and influence, and the establishment of the Coalition was a key strategy to build a highly skilled and empowered group that have the knowledge, skills and confidence to campaign for policy reform to remove restrictions on access to legal and safe abortion. Religious leaders are key members of the Coalition. The Coalition members underwent capacity strengthening through a regional workshop, using a comprehensive SRHR Policy Advocacy toolkit developed by SAFAIDS. In the aftermath of the workshop, SAFAIDS continues to support and mentor Coalition members, who are engaging in targeted advocacy with policy makers and parliamentarians at regional and national levels. Some of the Coalition members are also involved in the regional Let's Talk Campaign, led by UNESCO, in partnership with SAFAIDS, UNFPA ESARO and Save the Children Sweden, where they act as leading advocates calling on governments and other stakeholders to address the issue of EUP amongst AGYW.

In March 2020, a Regional Sectoral Policy Dialogue was hosted with traditional and religious leader representatives, including two Monarchs, from 16 SADC Member States, to deliberate on empirical evidence and the socio-economic, politico-legal and public health adverse impact of unsafe abortions on AGYW. The religious leaders identified strategies to facilitate lifting of policy restrictions to safe abortion, and subsequently saving lives of AGYW in the SADC region. These two groups (religious and traditional leaders) are tremendously influential at community level, and their opposition to abortion also leads to opposition from policymakers, such as Parliamentarians and Government officials. The structured strategies applied during the Dialogue, including frank and honest deliberations amongst the leaders, resulted in a consensus and commitment by the traditional and religious leaders to shift away from addressing safe abortion as a moral matter, to addressing it through a public health and 'saving lives' lens. Contributions, commitments and recommendations from the Dialogue fed into a Regional Roadmap for Safe Abortions, which is being populated with inputs from other sectoral leaders and policymakers, through to 2021. The regional My Choice, Our Choice Campaign was officially launched with the traditional and religious leaders at the Dialogue, affirming their commitment to the Campaign, and visually holding-up safe abortion advocacy posters and postcards in solidarity with this important SRHR agenda. This was a pioneering milestone for garnering religious and traditional leadership buy-in to the safe abortion agenda in the SADC region. They joined the Campaign and continue to be engaged in its roll-out across the region, into 2021. The Campaign advocates with policy makers to remove or relax existing legal restrictions surrounding access to safe abortion, and to eliminate associated stigma and discrimination.

## Key challenges – and how they responded

A major challenge in engaging religious leaders on safe abortion issues, is their pro-life beliefs supported by skewed interpretation of religious texts. SAFAIDS has navigated this challenge by encouraging discussion of other key values in the respective religious doctrines, such as love, compassion, empathy, non-judgement, tolerance, protection of all, and preservation of life. The aim is not to convince religious leaders that abortion is 'right', but rather to move the conversation away from a simple morality matter towards issues of health and safety, raising awareness among religious leaders of the vulnerable situation that many women and girls are placed in, and the impact of current unsafe abortion practices on them.



As a neutral civil society body, whose intent is to promote human and social development, SAfAIDS is without religious affiliation or bias and well-positioned to advance advocacy around controversial and highly contentious SRHR related issues. However, SAfAIDS is also without religious authority, therefore it has invested in a pool of Religious Leader Champions across the region, through previous programming interventions who they continue to collaborate with in new initiatives, such as the Transforming Lives Programme. A spirit of trust and solidarity has been built between SAfAIDS and the religious leadership community. This core pool of religious leaders subsequently engage, in a way SAfAIDS cannot, directly with their peers, and enable unpacking the role of religious leadership in advancing SRHR in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context, which is progressive and addressing key challenges facing their respective communities.

*His Royal Majesty Mfumu Difima Ntinu speaks-out as a Champion promoting access to SRHR, including safe abortion services by AGYW, at the SAfAIDS Sectoral Leadership Policy Dialogue, March 2020. Photo by SAfAIDS.*



*SAfAIDS Launches Regional My Choice, Our Choice Campaign on ending unsafe abortion amongst Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) in the SADC region, with Traditional and Religious Leaders and Monarch Representatives from 16 SADC Member States, March 2020. Photo by SAfAIDS*

## Key lessons learnt by SAfAIDS

- In addressing controversial issues, for which urgent action from governments and other key stakeholders are needed, working with religious leaders as allies and Champions is an effective strategy and best practice. Although the process is not a quick one and requires consistent dialogue and conversation, the long-term benefits are sustainable. In a region such as SADC, religious institutions and leaders are highly esteemed and continue to influence and shape broader State politics.
- Religious leaders can act as a bridge between policy makers and citizens. SAfAIDS collaborations with the religious sector over the past decade, has further recognised that strategic and respectful engagement with the sector equips it to take bolder stances in influencing policymakers' response to the key SRHR related challenges faced by communities. Religious leaders are able to do this because they can influence the beliefs and opinions of key stakeholders in critical discourse, including in 'tougher' areas such as gender equality and SRHR, as well as gender identity and sexual orientation.



## Additional information



- *Our My Choice, Our Choice (MCOC) Campaign. [Animation files in English, French and Portuguese](#)*

# NEGOTIATING FOR INTERRELIGIOUS OPPOSITION TO VAWG IN LEBANON<sup>1</sup>

ABAAD

<p><b>Country/countries</b> Lebanon</p> <p><b>Region</b> EU Neighborhood and Enlargement</p> <p><b>Related SDGs</b></p> 	<p><b>Corresponding GAP III 2020–2025 key thematic areas of engagement</b></p> <p>Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence</p> 
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## Background

ABAAD, established in 2011, is a non-profit, non-politically affiliated, non-religious, UN ECOSOC accredited civil association focussed on the promotion of equality, protection and the empowerment of marginalised groups, especially women. It engages with men and women to realise a society free of hegemonic masculinities, violence against women, and discrimination. ABAAD is based in Lebanon and has implemented a number of projects promoting gender equality and countering gender-based violence (GBV) in this country. ABAAD believes that the transformation of the patriarchal structures that produce violence requires not only political action, but also transformation of societal structures. This is why they work with women and men, as well as civil society and religious leaders. In 2019, ABAAD's Undress 522 Campaign was awarded the UN SDG Action Award for the most impactful campaign globally.

While Lebanon is a secular nation state, the political system is based on the recognition and representation of 19 different religious communities: five Islamic, 13 Christian, and one Jewish. The leaders of these religious communities have tremendous power and influence, as everything relating to marriage, divorce and other family matters are governed by religious courts. The same law literally does not apply to all Lebanese: as there are 19 different religious communities, there are 19 different Personal Status Laws.

<sup>1</sup> This case study was drafted by Elisabet le Roux, with the support of ABAAD. It is part of a series of five case studies and a reflection note synthesising lessons learnt on engaging religious actors on gender-based violence. A further notable resource is a scoping note on engaging with faith-based organisations and religious actors, prepared by Marie Juul Petersen and Beatriz Sanz Corella (2020).

## Why work with religious actors?

For ABAAD, engaging with religious actors was a logical response to the reality of the political system and the complex interplay between state and religion in Lebanon. Yet engaging with religious actors on issues to do with women's rights is challenging because of the actual or perceived polarization between women's rights activism and religion. Nevertheless, ABAAD recognised that engaging with religion is a crucial component of addressing gender inequalities and GBV in Lebanon. In the lives of so many people and communities, religion is a lived reality that plays a decisive role in how people see men and women and their relative value.

However, ABAAD was aware of how politicised such engagement can become. Therefore, by situating itself as a humanitarian, inclusive, non-discriminatory and non-religious organisation, ABAAD avoided becoming aligned with one of the religious sects and thus entangled in the complexity of state and religion. Furthermore, it intentionally engaged with religious leaders from different religions and religious affiliations, thus avoiding accusations of partisanship, and facilitated interaction and communication between these different actors, thus contributing to building trust and cohesiveness amongst these different religious communities.

## What did they do?

Concerned about unjust and unequal gender relations in Lebanon, particularly as facilitated by the legal injustices of the religious governance of family matters, ABAAD engaged with religious leaders in a series of roundtable dialogues entitled 'ABAAD dialogues with Religious leaders to end GBV in the MENA Region', in 2012-2015 and again in 2018. While selecting religious leaders from different religions and religious affiliations, selection criteria revolved around choosing those leaders that already showed a willingness to address gender inequality and violence against women, to cooperate with other religious leaders and civil society, and to promote 'progressive' ideas. ABAAD felt that convening such a group would already create a more facilitative environment. However, ABAAD also facilitated the development of such an environment, by having the first session of a new roundtable discussion focus on mutual acceptance and respectful communication. Furthermore, ABAAD facilitated the roundtables with an 'agree to disagree' approach, knowing that everyone will not always have similar beliefs or opinions. They therefore emphasised that disagreements should not halt the conversation. One way in which they navigated the challenge of conflicting beliefs, is by relying on a public health approach. They would steer discussions away from arguments about values, to focusing on medical and health-related facts.

During the roundtables, religious leaders identified causes of GBV. These included religious interpretations and teachings, as well as a lack of understanding of the equal rights of women and men. The participatory process also led to the conclusion, as formulated by the religious leaders themselves, that societal systems impose traditional and patriarchal social norms in the name of religion. The religious leaders identified roles that they could play in ending GBV and developed strategies for partnerships between civil society and religious leaders.

These roundtable discussions have, in turn, impacted ABAAD's advocacy work on Lebanese legislation. ABAAD believes the roundtables played a key role in having religious endorsement for the passing of Law 293/2014 (that focuses on protecting women and all family members from violence), as well as support from religious leaders for the 2017 abolishment of Article 522 from the Lebanese Penal Code. Article 522 allowed rapists to marry their victims in order to evade legal prosecution and penalty.



ABAAD entered these roundtables with a concrete goal, namely having religious leaders partner in identifying, developing and implementing interventions that can contribute to ending violence against women and support children's rights. This is why the 2012 We Believe campaign that mainly grew from the roundtable discussions was such a positive development. The We Believe campaign was a media campaign in which prominent faith leaders from different religions and religious traditions publicly and explicitly condemned and distanced themselves from violence against women and various specific practices. Their messages were deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Bible, emphasising the religious call to end violence against women. It was the religious leaders themselves who decided to incorporate sacred scriptures into their messages, believing that it will resonate with their followers. The campaign used various media platforms, including television advertisements, billboards, radio commercials, online advertisements, social media, and news media



*ABAAD Conference table*

## Challenges – and how they responded

Some religious leaders have criticised ABAAD's work as being part of 'a Western imperialist project' that counters religious values and promotes Western ideas and power. ABAAD has handled such challenges by being sensitive and willing to compromise. For example, ABAAD emphasises the importance of listening to religious leaders to discover areas of shared concern. Rather than entering a discussion with a pre-set agenda, they ask religious leaders to identify the GBV concerns that they see as most pressing. Furthermore, ABAAD is very careful in the terminology they use. They do not use terms such as 'harmful traditional practices' or 'honour-related violence'. Rather, they found that more 'neutral' terms like 'domestic violence' or 'violence against women' are more useful, eliciting fewer defensive responses.

ABAAD's We Believe campaign was criticised by some feminist groups for legitimizing the patriarchal authority of male religious leaders that already, because of the Personal Status Laws, have extensive control over women's autonomy and family affairs. ABAAD engaged with this criticism, explaining their initiative as having a religious and rights-based approach to achieving gender equality and non-violence, and as a situational, context-sensitive strategy to promote human rights. As a once-off intervention, the campaign will of course not end patriarchy, but as the first step in a long-term approach, it opens doors for future conversations and strategic alliances. The criticism from feminist groups motivated ABAAD to closely engage with these groups during their discussions with religious leaders, creating safe spaces for dialogue around shared areas of interest between groups that previously avoided one another. In this way ABAAD succeeded in bringing together a diverse group of religious leaders and civil society organizations to collaborate, create, and strengthen partnerships in advocating for the rights of women and girls in Lebanon.



*We Believe campaign*



## Key lessons learnt by ABAAD

- When you work with religious leaders, find common ground. The first step is to be careful and intentional in selecting the terminology used during engagement. Furthermore, define clear criteria for selection of religious leaders.
- It is of the utmost importance that religious leaders take ownership of the engagement and the ideas flowing from it. Therefore, avoid engaging with religious leaders with a prepared agenda around what should be achieved. The leaders themselves must develop and own the goals and methods of achieving it.
- It is important to be culturally sensitive in working with religious leaders. Insensitivity will limit, or even totally halt, meaningful engagement. The cultural background is different for different religions. Be knowledgeable and respectful of the specific cultural practices upheld by a religious community. This could be e.g. dress codes, dietary requirements, or ways of greeting.
- Engaging with religious leaders is a long-term strategic approach to achieving social behavioural change. Multi-year programmes – and funding for such programmes – is essential in ensuring the needed continued engagement with religious leaders.

## Additional information





- [www.abaadmena.org](http://www.abaadmena.org)
- [Facebook](#)

### Videos

- [Violence Against Women in Lebanon: A Dialogue between Religious Leaders and Civil Society](#)
- [We Believe... Highlights of the Campaign](#)
- [We Believe... Campaign '...' \(Subtitled\)](#)

# PARTNERING TO ADDRESS VAWG IN CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN LIBERIA<sup>1</sup>

Episcopal Relief & Development

<p><b>Country/countries</b> Liberia</p> <p><b>Region</b> Africa</p> <p><b>Related SDGs</b></p> 	<p><b>Corresponding GAP III 2020–2025 key thematic areas of engagement</b></p> <p>Ensuring freedom from all forms of genderbased violence</p> 
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## Background

Episcopal Relief & Development, a faith-based international relief and development agency which defines itself as the compassionate response of The Episcopal Church to human suffering around the world. A significant portion of its work focuses on gender justice and combatting gender-based violence (GBV). For a number of years, it has been working with Christian and Muslim religious leaders and communities in Liberia, partnering with Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief and Development (ECLRD), the humanitarian arm of The Episcopal Church of Liberia.

Between 2015 and 2017, the UN Women's UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) and Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA) contributed to this partnership, by supporting a three-year project by Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD to improve violence prevention and response to women survivors through engaging faith leaders. Based on the promising results of Phase 1 of the project and its endline evaluation affirming the potential of religious leaders as an entry point into communities, the UN Trust Fund and IRUSA both awarded the project a second round of funding, contributing to a 4-year Phase 2 initiative that runs through 2022.

<sup>1</sup> This case study was drafted by Elisabet le Roux, with the support of Episcopal Relief & Development. It is part of a series of five case studies and a reflection note synthesising lessons learnt on engaging religious actors on gender-based violence. A further notable resource is a scoping note on engaging with faith-based organisations and religious actors, prepared by Marie Juul Petersen and Beatriz Sanz Corella (2020).

With the Liberian state's limited resources and infrastructure, religious leaders and communities play a significant role in community cohesion and support in a country where more than 98% of its citizens identify as religious. Liberia's religious community also has a history of interfaith activism, having mobilised extensively to promote peace during Liberia's civil war.

## Why work with religious actors?

Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD work with religious actors not only because they themselves are faith-based organisations, but because they believe engaging with religious actors allows for sustainable programming. Religious actors and structures are present at grassroots-level and survive and persevere even in challenging circumstances. Episcopal Relief & Development has always done interfaith work and Liberia, with its rich history of interfaith cooperation and collaboration, was thus a logical setting in which to conduct an interfaith intervention. It was this interfaith approach, where those of different religions work closely together, that the UN Trust Fund and IRUSA found especially interesting.

In planning the project and developing the GBV Toolkit crucial to it, Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD engaged with the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL). The IRCL identified key high-level religious leaders to assist in the project's design and development. With the roll-out of the project in specific counties, community mappings were conducted, during which community leaders identified all of the places of worship in the community. The leader of each church/mosque would then be invited to be part of the project.

## What did they do?

Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD's project is designed to address GBV at its roots, by seeking to shift the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours around how women and girls are valued and treated at the individual, family and community levels. The project was designed and developed in Liberia, with consistent input from representatives of the IRCL, for Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD believed that buy-in and acceptance of transformative messaging would require that it be designed, contextualized and piloted with strong leadership and theological guidance from senior religious leaders from the country itself.

A key part of this process was developing the Faith Leader GBV Toolkit, a GBV prevention and response toolkit to empower Christian and Muslim religious leaders to speak out against GBV in their communities, and to more effectively support survivors of violence. The Toolkit uses experiential learning methods to guide religious leaders on a journey of self-discovery, to change their own attitudes, and to feel more empowered to speak out on and address GBV. It engages with sacred scriptures that have been used to justify or excuse the mistreatment of women and girls, guiding a process of more equitable messaging that emphasizes respect, responsibility and dignity. The process of mutually studying and reflecting on Qur'anic and Biblical texts became a bonding process between Muslim and Christian clerics and generated a sense of common purpose.

The first phase of the project was rolled out in two of Liberia's 15 counties, while the second phase added two more counties. Religious leaders are invited to a five-day workshop, where the Toolkit is used to sensitise, enlighten, transform and mobilise them to address GBV. After the workshop, religious leaders are supported and mentored by ECLRD staff. In phase 2 of the project, refresher workshops are also included.

The Toolkit includes extensive materials to help religious leaders in speaking out against GBV once they go home. Included in these materials are FAMA (Facts, Association, Meaning and Action) cards, which have proven very effective in communities where many individuals are not literate. The methodology uses pictures of typical Liberian situations to walk participants through a process of self-discovery and stimulate dialogue.

## Challenges – and how they responded

The endline evaluation of Phase 1 revealed that women and girls' attitudes towards gender equality and acceptance of violence changed less than men and boys' attitudes. In reflecting on this, Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD realised that the project does not engage with and invest enough in female religious leaders. Therefore, as the top-level religious leaders are usually male, Phase 2 has been designed to more intentionally identify and engage with lay religious leaders – particularly the leaders of Savings & Education groups – for these individuals are mostly women. The Toolkit has also been expanded to include more scripture and religious stories that focus on women, their strength and their agency.



*Project's implementation. Photo by Ernest Cajuste.*



*Photo by Ernest Cajuste.*

The project aims to empower religious leaders to speak out against GBV and support survivors. However, while it was effective in mobilising religious leaders to speak out against GBV, the endline evaluation of Phase 1 showed that religious leaders still feel ill-equipped to handle survivors' disclosures, particularly in dealing with their trauma. Therefore, the Toolkit and workshop has been adapted to include trauma awareness, so that religious leaders are better equipped to support survivors. Furthermore, realising that there may be survivors within the workshop space, the workshop is currently being adapted to ensure it embodies a survivor-centred approach.

The Toolkit was designed with Liberian religious leaders and includes many sessions and exercises where sacred scripture from the Bible and Qur'an are discussed. However, during Phase 1 Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD learnt that this theological engagement is not enough. Religious leaders repeatedly requested more theological material to help them make the link between their religion, their sacred scripture, and responses to violence within their communities. The Toolkit has now been extended to include more such guided reflections on sacred scriptures, which religious leaders can use within their communities.

## Key lessons learnt by ABAAD

- Partnership and collaboration at all levels was and is crucial to the project. Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD are long-term partners, and in designing and implementing the project has partnered with various international and national actors, including the Liberian Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. Within each county, multi-sector partnerships at local level – with police, teachers, traditional leaders, and local government – have been pivotal in ensuring support for survivors, and has allowed for community-specific support structures to develop.
- Multi-sector partnership is needed, but must be coordinated so that there is no duplication. In resource-challenged settings, this is particularly important. Long-term partnerships lead to trust, which leads to less duplication and more collaboration.
- The experiential learning process is crucial to the success of the project. Religious leaders are not being trained on GBV. Rather, they take part in a facilitated process of self-discovery and reflection. This has been crucial to changing the way they see gender inequality and violence, and mobilising to become advocates for change.

## Additional information



- *Project's Evaluation Summary: Engaging Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Women and Girls in Liberia 2015-2017*





