

# ENGAGING FAITH ACTORS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Best Practices from the  
NCA Global GBV programme  
**2016-2019**



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Dr. Denis Mukwege at Panzi Hospital in Congo. **PHOTO:** Endre Vestvik/Norwegian Church Aid.

These are days of celebration. After decades of devoting himself to help women and children victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dr. Denis Mukwege, and Nadia Murad, herself a victim of war crimes perpetrated against Yazidi in Iraq, were awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize for their outstanding work to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict. They have defended victims and repeatedly condemned impunity for mass rape as a war crime. Perpetrators must be held accountable and victims must achieve justice. Sexual violence as a weapon of war is a war crime and threat to peace and security as set out in the UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008) and by the International Criminal Court.

NCA has been supporting Dr. Mukwege and Panzi Hospital since 1994 and provides support to victims of violence of the Yazidi communities in North Iraq. Our aim for a more peaceful world will only be achieved if women are protected and their fundamental right to security is recognised. To do so, we have been spearheading engagement with faith actors to tackle gender inequalities and gender-based violence globally. Faith leaders play a key role in shaping norms and practices as well as in changing these when leading to injustices. Patriarchal interpretation of religious scriptures and dogma have often contributed to gender injustice. Guardians of customs, including

faith leaders, must play a key role in shifting from discriminatory and violent gender norms and practices that condone gender injustice to positive norms that uphold equal rights without gender-based violence. Religious leaders, including female faith leaders, can play important roles in promoting gender justice in communities and within faith institutions.

We often see that faith actors can be part of the solution rather than the problem when working and advocating for gender justice. This is the reality we want to highlight with this publication. Through thirteen examples drawn from different countries and contexts we are highlighting best practices. With this publication, we aim to strengthen NCA's efforts and to inspire sister organisations and religious institutions, to continuously tackle gender injustices, its root causes and its consequences.

Lisa Sivertsen  
Deputized General Secretary



During a public anti FGM event an uncutgirls group in Siraro carried a moto saying no to the practice. Arsi, Ethiopia.

**PHOTO:** Hilina Abebe/Norwegian Church Aid

## INTRODUCTION

### Engaging faith actors in ending gender-based violence, best practices and lessons learned

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a form of gender injustice which affects millions of girls and women in the world and is deep rooted in social gender norms and practices. More than one of three women globally is suffering from intimate partner violence. GBV is a leading cause of death, illnesses and disabilities of women at all ages. The cost on women and their environment is tremendous. GBV is a barrier to women's equal right to participation, citizenship and access to and control over resources.

With this publication we want to present some of the best practices and lessons learned from the *NCA Global GBV Programme 2016-2020* contributing to the right to a life free from violence by changing social norms and practices that upholds GBV. Various forms of GBV are addressed in the programme: sexual violence and exploitation, sexual slavery and trafficking, domestic violence/partner violence, child marriage, forced marriage, harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). NCA has worked to end GBV and promote gender justice for more than a decade in partnership with faith and interfaith-based organisations as well as other civil society organisations, women's networks, youth groups etc. In 2018, the programme runs in 18 countries with long-term development projects as well as GBV in more specific humanitarian response (GBV in Emergencies). The programme receives funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Norway, Norad, the European Union,

the Dutch government, ACT Alliance sister organisations, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR and others. NCA would like to thank all the donors for their valuable support.

A range of methods are used in the NCA Global GBV programme to engage faith actors and religious leaders, like providing theological reflection, sensitisation, developing manuals and curricula for constituencies, priests, imams, students and teachers, community conversations and dialogues, declarations on commitments, capacity building on methods like Reflect, Behaviour Change Communication, and Positive Masculinity, etc. This publication provides various examples on methods used and actions taken to support GBV survivors and changing social norms that uphold GBV.

Engaging faith actors and religious leaders, women and men, at local, national and global levels, can contribute to norm changes, provide support to survivors and contribute to legislative processes when laws discriminate. Faith leaders have a potentially transformative role together with people of faith in tackling root causes of gender inequality and GBV by speaking out based on both a moral and political concern. By this they are part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

We would like to thank all those who shared their stories to end GBV and promote gender justice – beneficiaries of the projects, partner organisations and program staff of NCA in various countries. You all made this publication real and hopefully useful to others.

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Regional GBV Advocacy Officer



Yezidi woman in the Lalesh temple.  
PHOTO: Håvard Bjelland/Norwegian Church Aid.

Best practice 1

## Encouraging and supporting development of theological reflections on gender justice and GBV

### Theological reflections lead religious leaders to tackle FGM in Ethiopia

The national prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Ethiopia among women age 15-49 is 65% and 16% among girls 0-14.<sup>1</sup> FGM is mainly practiced due to religious and cultural justifications such as keeping the girl's virginity, a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood, showing that a girl belongs to a certain tribe (identity), marriage ability etc.

The government of Ethiopia has contributed towards the reduction of the practice and various legal instruments to end FGM have been provided, such as the Constitution of Ethiopia, the penal code, the revised family law, and various strategies and policies. The government is committed to end FGM and child marriage by 2025 by increasing the budget, ensuring accountability, availing evidences and facilitating coordination mechanisms. NCA Ethiopia has been cooperating with faith actors and religious leaders for more than 10 years to end FGM. Through the support of Norwegian government and UN agencies, NCA Ethiopia has engaged relevant faith actors such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC), the Ethiopian Muslim Development Agency (EMDA), the Ethiopian Catholic Church Social and Development Commission (ECC-SDCO), the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekaneyesus Development and Social Services Commission (EECMY-DASSC) and the Inter Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE). The consecutive engagement of the leadership of ECCE, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and the Ethiopian Catholic Church provided theological reflection and resulted in declarations that FGM has no religious base and thereby declared zero tolerance to FGM. This was done in the presence of the top religious leaders and high government officials. Alongside the declarations, the faith-based organisations (FBOs) were engaged in consecutive intra and interfaith dialogue to end FGM. NCA Ethiopia provided technical support for institutionalization of the work to end FGM within the FBOs existing structures to ensure sustainability and

ownership. Accordingly, 68 theology colleges and Bible schools have integrated FGM in their curriculums. Anti-FGM messages are disseminated through regular sermons, women groups, Sunday school and youth teachings, faith media, faith owned health facilities and schools.

Regardless of the effort in ending FGM in Ethiopia, there are still challenges where the practice is continuing in different forms. Clandestine practices are underway where people take their daughters to adjacent districts for circumcisions, shifting the practice from infibulation to "sunna". Medicalization of the practice where FGM is performed by health professionals, giving FGM another name and denying that FGM is happening, are among the major challenges seen at the community level. Taking a stand on FGM is not clear among the Muslim religious leaders as some are supporting total abandonment while others support 'sunna', so reaching a consensus is challenging.

Finding the right entry point and developing trust by understanding religious diversity and power dynamics between and within faith actors makes the work of social norm change effective as no one size fits for all. Integrating issues of FGM and other harmful practices into the existing structures of FBOs like school, health facilities, theology/bible schools and others contribute to sustain the change. Faith actors can play a key role to expedite change at various level, if only they own the process, are well supported and build their capacities. Keeping the momentum is very crucial but one should not 'push' rather continue dialogue with them. NCA shares its work and displays the added value of working with the different faiths through its different networks including the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM, the Child Policy, Research and Practice Forum, the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association, and Child Protection/GBV sub clusters.

<sup>1</sup> Ethiopian Demographic and Health survey



Participants of the first Inter faith dialogue forum on FGM and other harmful practices.  
PHOTO: Norwegian Church Aid, Ethiopia

## Supporting women in faith-based organisations and faith institutions' leadership

### Women ordained as Baptist religious leaders in Myanmar

In Myanmar, NCA and its partner the Myanmar Institute of Theology-Gender Studies Centre (MIT-GSC), have been implementing a project focusing on gender aspects and the lack of female leadership in Baptist Christian institutions in 2017 and 2018. The target areas are located in Mandalay Region, Chin State and Shan State. The direct beneficiaries of the project are Bible school students, teachers and their related associations' leaders. These individuals are usually very conservative, formal, and subscribe to the dominant patriarchal cultural gender norms. Some leaders refused to recognize GBV, neither human rights, nor accepted women from specific ethnicities to be ordained as ministers, claiming these are ideas issued from Western ideology. The goal of the project is for faith-based academic institutions to prevent GBV and to promote gender equality, through equipping faith-based women leaders to become agents of change. To do so, supporting gathering of ordained women and conducting a research on "The Journey of Ordained Women Minister in Myanmar Baptist Convention" have been key.

There are 10,440 ministers in the Myanmar Baptist Convention, among them 2,837 are female; there are also 2,834 ordained ministers and among them 51 are women, according to the last collection data list dated from 2014 from the Myanmar Baptist Convention. In 2017, MIT-GSC has organized an ordained women ministers bringing together 52 ordained women ministers from 12 Baptist conventions. The purpose of the meeting was to share their experiences, knowledge and to empower each other. The commonality during sharing sessions was that women who were recently ordained lacked confidence in their new functions. Some of the ordained women had only received the title, but were not able to be of service in the wider community since their top leadership had intimated them to stay in their region and not to travel to other areas so they could stay at home and fulfil their traditional role of mothers and wives. Not all conventions give the opportunity to have women ordained; like in Kachin and Kayah, where the top religious leadership considers that the Bible defines women as

subordinates to men, so women cannot be ordained. By sharing their experiences, religious women inspire each other and encourage each other; and whenever they meet each other in various religious events, they recall the sweet memory from the ordained women gathering. The ordained women have planned to meet every three years and to advocate towards other conventions to recognize and promote women's leadership in the Baptist community.

Before the meeting, ordained women felt isolated in their struggle. However, when listening to each other's stories, they realized that many of them are facing similar challenges, encouraging them to continue their work and to intensify advocacy to enable more women to be ordained. Though, despite good results, some conventions still think that socially defined role for women does not make them suitable to be ordained. According to them, the role of women remains in the private sphere, staying at home and managing household chores, rather than being involved in the public sphere by playing leading roles in religion. When discussing women ordination, some male religious leaders immediately put an end to the discussion. However, MIT advocacy work is bridging the gap by bringing together influential women religious leaders, male staffs, male gender champions, male graduated theological students and teachers to discuss women in ministries and to advocate actively for better women representation within religious institutions. MIT has also been collaborating with minister departments and women departments responsible for ordination in the Myanmar Baptist Convention to encourage further ordination of women.

Efforts must continue to be directed towards empowerment of ordained women ministers, to build their self-confidence and strengthen their influence; empowerment of un-ordained women, so women leadership in ministries is encouraged and women are given the capacities to take on such roles; and advocacy towards religious leadership, especially male leadership, to create more acceptance for women's leadership in religion.



Ordained women ministries during the ordained women gathering. PHOTO: Norwegian Church Aid, Myanmar

### Supporting women in Churches' leadership in Zambia

Women face challenges today as they attempt to ascend to leadership positions in public spaces, including Churches. Cultural and societal factors remain chief obstacles to effective women's participation in leadership. As faith-based organisations (FBOs) and religious leaders operate in a patriarchal society, women's search for an enhanced status is subjected to the dynamics of power, authority, and social expectations that tend to undermine equality. FBOs and religious leaders' presence in local communities, coupled with their capacity to deliver critical services in health and education, allow them to mobilize grassroots support and influence changes in social and cultural norms. Working with FBOs and religious leaders is also crucial in areas where governance structures are weak and fail to ensure human rights and administer basic services, including in relation to gender discrimination in protection, justice and education. Aiming at a Zambia free from GBV where rights of women, men, girls and boys are respected and upheld, the joint country programme NCA/DCA/Christian Aid engages with FBOs and religious leaders through the following partners: Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops, Zambia National Women's Lobby, Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia, and the Catholic Diocese of Ndola.

The programme prioritizes women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality, with a special focus on gender-based violence. Empowering women to occupy leadership positions in religious institutions is part of a strategy relying on women of faith as change agents. Small Christian Community is a group of people of one faith (or who believe and go to one church) meeting together in other communities, sharing the word of God, helping each other, eating together etc. The use of Small Christian Communities provides avenues

where members interact and tap into the collective wisdom of trained women, men and youths in leadership. Women of faith have been trained in leadership skills to take up leadership positions within the Churches and at community level, such as in the Small Christian Communities. Trained women have demonstrated increased confidence and assertiveness in their roles as Church leaders and community leaders and are confident to take up higher positions. Women have also been empowered to play an active part in prayers and religious celebrations, such as reading the Bible in church. In 2017, ninety-seven (97) women from literacy classes assumed leadership positions in the Church at various levels. Out of a total of 70 available positions for chairperson in the Small Christian Communities, outstations and lay groups from Solwezi, Chipata, Livingstone, Monze and Mongu Dioceses, 54 are being held by women that were trained under the programme.

Churches in Zambia evolve in a very patriarchal environment, the low-rating perception of women as leaders tends to filter into the church and hinders their participation in leadership positions. Low confidence among women compared to men and high illiteracy level are also factors that impact female leadership. However, literacy classes for women have helped overcome cultural and other social barriers to women in leadership roles in the Churches. By engendering the training curriculum for seminarians, infusing teachings on gender sensitive leadership and interrogating religious doctrines and practices, newly ordained priests are mentored on gender mainstreaming and supporting female participation in leadership in the parishes they are deployed to.

## Engaging with faith actors on harmful practices at community level through community dialogue

### Somalia programme successfully engages with religious leaders through community conversation to end female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) and child early and forced marriage (CEFM)

The FGM Joint programme in Somalia is implemented since 2016 by NCA, Save the Children (SC) and local partners KAAALO AID for Development (KAAALO) and Tadamun Social Society (TASS). It covers six districts in Gedo region and Puntland state. The joint FGM programme goal is to contribute towards elimination of CEFM and all forms of FGM/C in targeted communities. Specifically, the programme puts emphasis on working with religious leaders to commit and proactively take action to end all forms of FGM/C and CEFM in Somalia. It uses Community Conversations (CC) as an approach for religious leaders' engagement.

The Community Conversation model helps to create a common understanding and generate community responses to critical problems in the community. The model recognizes communities' capacities to identify and explore concerns within their communities as well as understand their right and responsibility to make appropriate decisions that can bring lasting change and transformation. NCA and partners use CC to engage religious leaders to discuss FGM/C and other harmful practices such as CEFM so that they can actively take actions and condemn the practice. This is likely to have an impact on the community's behaviour, given the respect and influence religious leaders command. Religious leaders meet on a monthly basis; and occasionally a religious scholar is invited to participate in their conversations and share religious teachings and perspectives on FGM/C and protection of women and girls in general. Given their understanding of religion hence the ability to delink religion from cultural practices, they serve as crucial change agents who can educate members of the community to understand that these harmful practices are social and cultural oriented and have nothing to do with religion hence not a religious requirement.

One of the key results of engaging religious leaders is that they are proactively taking the lead in educating communities on the harmfulness of FGM/C and condemning the practice in various spheres such as mosques, public events and through media. In some project locations, religious leaders and local authorities have issued joint declarations as commitment against FGM/C which is attributed to NCA and partners' efforts. Moreover, some of the religious leaders stand out as role models by making personal decisions to protect their own daughters against FGM and early child marriage. However, some of the religious leaders are divided in their support against all forms of FGM and this impacts efforts towards realization of zero tolerance to FGM. In addition, while in some locations the religious leaders are more structured and have a network coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, as in the case of Puntland state, in other locations such as Gedo region they are loosely structured making it difficult to consistently engage the same leaders.

In the process, when possible, it is critical to engage top religious leaders as they are more influential, and their decisions are endorsed by most religious leaders and communities. Engaging religious scholars in religious leaders' CC forums helps to provoke critical discussions and understanding around religion in relation to FGM and related GBV issues. In addition, working with religious leaders promotes continuity and sustainability of programme efforts given that they are a source of moral authority with grassroots presence.

Collaboration with similar actors in Somalia such as the UN Joint programme (UNJP) and other organisations working in Somalia has been crucial. It provides an opportunity to network, share information and learn from each other's work. During the 1st phase of the project in 2014, the NCA/SC joint programme adopted the UNDP's campaign dubbed the "Saxarla campaign" that focuses on protection of the girl child from any form of harm, maintaining her as whole as she was created by God. The campaign messages were adopted by religious leaders and other change agents and continue to be used as advocacy talking points towards abandonment of all forms of FGM to date.



Religious leaders in a CC meeting in Garbaharrey district, Gedo region. **PHOTO:** Abukar Haji/Norwegian Church Aid, Somalia



Sheikh Hire a religious leader with his four daughters who he has vowed to protect from all forms of FGM. He has been actively participating in CC forums in Belet Hawa district, Gedo region. **PHOTO:** Abukar Haji/Norwegian Church Aid, Somalia

### In Mali, religious leaders embark with other community actors on social dialogue around FGM and early and forced marriage

In Mali, NCA has been implementing Debbo Alafia, a sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programme funded by the Embassy of the Netherlands, together with AMSS and APROMORS in the region of Timbuktu since 2014 and together with GREFFA, Zangela partners, AADIS-Mali, Hed-Tamat, Tarakat-Windila, Dadesa and 8 associations of women and young people in the regions of Gao and Menaka, since 2016. Early and forced marriage and FGM rates culminate in the regions of Northern Mali compare to the national level.<sup>2</sup> Approval of these practices by communities, including religious leaders, and the lack of interventions from state structures and I/NGOs in these areas are important factors explaining the width of the problem. The Debbo Alafia programme is promoting sexual and reproductive rights for women and girls, in other things by contributing to the reduction of traditional harmful practices.

Harmful practices affecting not only girls and women but also the community as a whole, NCA and partners have supported regular holding of social and intergenerational dialogue meetings around sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and GBV, both at intra-community level and at inter-community level. Such dialogues involve all components of the community: women and youths' groups, traditional leaders, local authorities and religious leaders. The establishment of such a dialogue framework enables to break the taboo that surrounds harmful practices by involving all layers of the society and letting each and every one of them express him/herself. As a result of these community dialogues, conventions of abandonment of FGM and child marriage are signed by all actors. The role and influence of local religious leaders in these social dialogues is key due to the authority that they embody and therefore their capacity to question attitudes and ideas that say that harmful practices are religious, when they are in fact old customary practices. To ensure that local religious leaders' participation to community dialogues is productive and that they develop a sense of ownership, NCA and partners have also been engaging

them through a forum of religious actors to discuss the issues of FGM and early and forced marriage and to develop and use arguments against harmful practices issued from Islam, and more specifically from the Hadiths. The inclusion of religious leaders in Village Committees to Abandon Harmful Practices (CVAPN) at local and village levels has also been a key factor to gain their support and to ensure the signature of Conventions of Abandonment of Traditional Harmful Practices.

As a result, the number of villages in target areas that have signed conventions to abandon child marriage has increased from 101 to 372 between 2016 and 2017. In Timbuktu region only, 20 conventions to abandon child marriage and FGM have been signed in the first semester of 2018. According to official statistics on public health, the FGM rate has reduced from 42% in 2016 to 34% in 2017 in the region of Timbuktu. The programme has also registered a positive and progressive change in some religious leaders' attitudes who used to be strongly opposed to the programme, change confirmed by the external evaluation of the programme realized in 2017 which noted that religious leaders' participation to the focus groups highlighted their support and ownership of the programme.

Involvement of resource persons, especially community and religious leaders, has largely contributed to the realization of positive results. While we might be pressed to register quick results, the engagement through social dialogues has shown that encouraging and seeking progressive transformation of discourse rather than brutal injunctions regarding the harmful practices bear fruits and ensure sustainability. In parallel, the lack of knowledge of communities makes it necessary to continuously build the capacity of local actors, including religious leaders, over time. Despite the good results registered by the programme, pockets of resistance to abandonment of FGM and early and forced marriage from religious actors remain.

<sup>2</sup> The regions of Gao, Menaka and Timbuktu total to 34% of FGM cases in Mali.

## Engaging with religious leaders in GBV survivors' service delivery

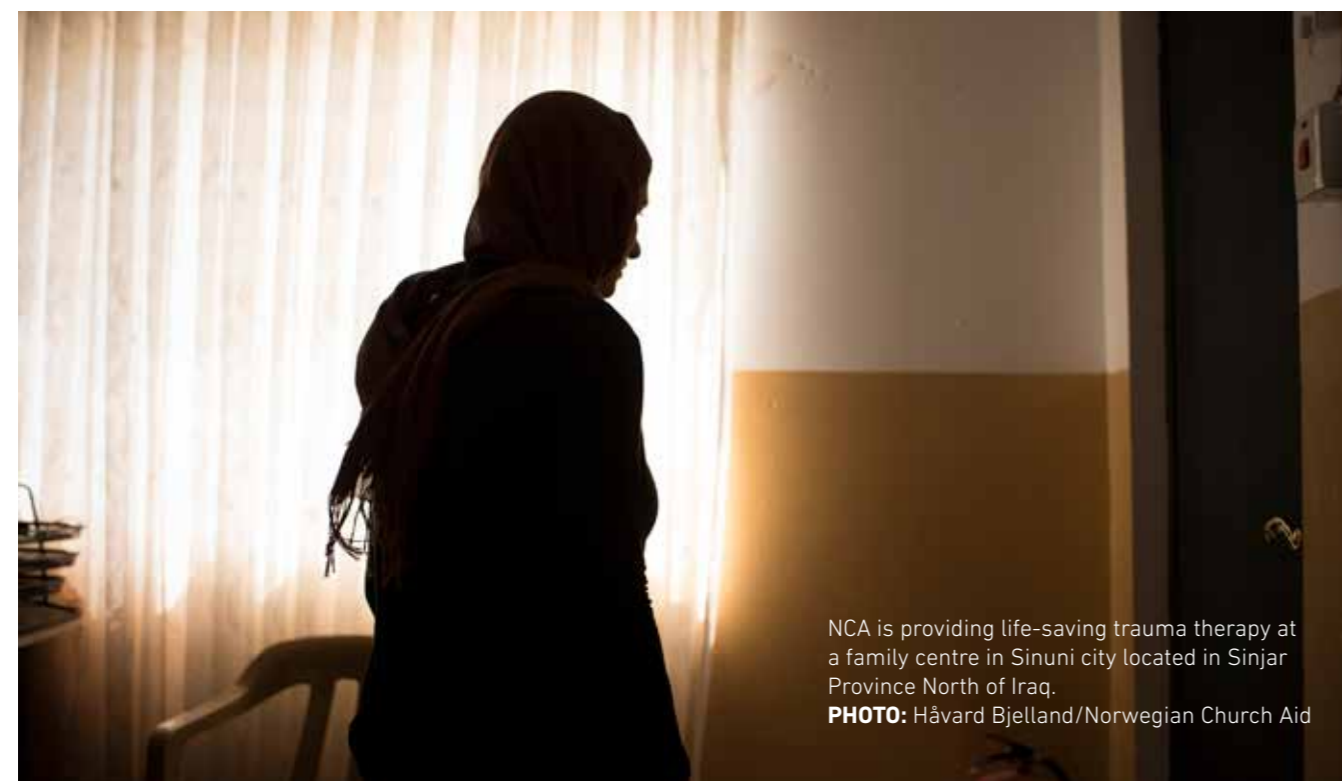
### Engaging with religious leaders in mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) and survivors' reintegration in North Iraq

Overall in Iraq a million people have been displaced and/or have immigrated to Syria and Turkey, thousands of people lost their lives, and women and girls have been particularly brutalized, with thousands abducted, trafficked, abused, forced to change their religion and subjected to rape including sexual slavery. In Northern Iraq, Norwegian Church Aid GBV programme funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is contributing to improving protection, health and psychosocial wellbeing of internally displaced people, vulnerable returnees and religious minorities as well as the reintegration of conflict-related sexual violence survivors into the community and families. To do so, NCA is involving religious and community leaders, and men and boys. NCA GBV programme targets ethnic-religious minorities, including Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkman, in northern Ninawa and Dohuk governorates.

NCA's intervention has been implemented since 2016 in an effort to alleviate the trauma faced by women, girls, and children, particularly from religious minorities, which include Yezidis in Sinjar and Tilkaif district in northern Nineveh. The program facilitated the main following two outcomes: *women, girls, and boys as survivors of GBV and displacement safely access adequate and appropriate support services; and community leaders, men, and boys prevent violence, and protect and promote the reintegration of GBV survivors at the community level.* Most of the survivors, upon their return/escape from captivity, face isolation, unacceptance and stigma in their community as they were forced to change their religion and/or sexually abused. In order to mitigate the consequences of GBV on women and girls, NCA has worked closely, among others, with religious/faith leaders to ensure survivors' healing, reintegration and acceptance from community. In the

Yezidi community, religious leaders have directly worked with survivors, sitting with them to listen to them and providing them with positive healing messages. Spiritual visits to Yezidi sacred sites of Lalish and Sharfadin were organized as part of the journey of healing and reintegration in the community. There, survivors undergo a cleansing ritual, they weep and pray in the primary temple before sitting with religious leaders who say messages of acceptance, affirming the value of women and girls. The religious ritual enables survivors' safe return in their community, free from blame and stigma. The family support center staff and women safe spaces indicated that the survivors are more self-accepting after receiving the spiritual messages, taking the trip to the sacred sites, participating in the support groups, benefitting from mental health services and the follow-up support sessions under case management and participating in recreational traditional activities.

This strategy of engagement with religious leaders creates great impact with few resources and longer-term community based psychosocial support services. To make it effective, NCA and partner have worked alongside with religious leaders from the Yezidi community to integrate elements of faith in the healing and reintegration processes. Both awareness raising and close collaboration with religious leaders have been critical elements of NCA MHPSS interventions addressing both the trauma experienced by the survivor and the stigma associated to the violation in the community.



NCA is providing life-saving trauma therapy at a family centre in Sinuni city located in Sinjar Province North of Iraq.

PHOTO: Håvard Bjelland/Norwegian Church Aid

### Faith actors and religious leaders facilitating access to GBV survivors' service delivery in South Sudan

NCA South Sudan operates in conflict and post conflict affected areas of South Sudan, specifically in Torit County, Wau State and Gurei area in Juba State. Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread and pervasive and has worsen since the latest conflict started in December 2013. Physical and domestic violence, early and forced marriage, sexual violence and rape undermine the health, dignity, security and autonomy of survivors, yet GBV remains shrouded in a culture of silence. Under the goal of the recently implemented programme seeking for women and girls' GBV survivors to safely access adequate and appropriate support services, NCA and its partner Daughters of Mary Immaculate- Komboni Sisters (DMI), a Catholic sisterhood, are providing services to survivors.

DMI has established GBV Monitoring and Protection Committees (GBV MPC) in the 10 communities targeted by the project. The committees include women and men from respective communities, religious leaders and community leaders. The GBV MPC are trained by DMI, focusing on building the capacities of committees' members on referral pathway, so they can play their part by identifying GBV related cases and supporting GBV survivors, referring them to service providers, engaging with relevant institutions such as the police, the military, the judiciary and local chiefs to ensure that the dignity and rights of survivors are respected in handling of GBV cases. In addition, the GBV MPC started engaging in awareness raising in the communities through the community conversation methodology. They have supported GBV survivors to engage with the judiciary system and to open legal cases that were previously ignored, therefore indirectly contributing to the arrest of perpetrators. At community level, the GBV MPC have gradually been gaining in trust and influence. Religious leaders being highly respected in South Sudan, their involvement in the committees is ensuring acceptance and credibility of these structures.

Faith actors are engaged at two levels: first as implementing partner through DMI, and second in GBV MPC with representation of religious leaders. Involvement of faith actors

has enabled a breakthrough in the culture of silence related to GBV: communities are sensitized, women and girls have more opportunities to report on abuses, to receive support and services, and to have their cases referred to legal institutions. These services are essential to ensure survivors' safety, dignity, reparation and smooth reintegration in their communities.

Despite the good results registered in the short implementation time of the programme, challenges persist. The perception of girls' and women's roles in the traditional society leads many women and men to deny the existence of GBV, believing for example that it is a man's right to punish his wife and to have sex regardless of the woman's consent. Creating awareness through community conversations, open meetings and training of members of GBV Monitoring and Protection Committees are all contributing to greater awareness and gradually changing these perceptions in the community. Due to their various duties and responsibilities in the church and in the communities, faith leaders are not always available. But NCA and DMI's engagement with faith actors through mobilisation and training is gradually creating an understanding and acceptance that work related to GBV, including supporting GBV survivors, is part of a faith leader's responsibilities. Responsible actors in the referral pathway are still not fully aware of their responsibilities and have limited resources to function due to the situation in South Sudan. It still remains a challenge and has not been fully addressed by the project/partner so far, but linking up with other actors, like the UN coordination system, government offices and other NGOs working in the area, and strengthening collaboration is a way of addressing this issue. The culture of silence around GBV is still prevailing, due to impunity and the fear of perpetrators, and due to stigmatization. Community conversations are a good start in creating awareness and understanding at community level and the police is also now openly discussing some of the challenges they have with regard to following up on GBV cases and addressing these.

## Engaging faith actors in advocacy from local to national level

### Religious leaders actively engaged in policy processes in Pakistan

In Pakistani context, religious leaders are the most respected figures in their communities and every domain of public life. Imams and leaders of other faith communities, such as priests and pundits (Hindu religious leaders) play a powerful role in shaping attitudes, opinions and behaviours. They can shape social norms and they have the power to promote and support laws and public policies ensuring respect of women's rights in line with faith-based teachings.

Creating a structure of change agents including the faith leaders at the three tiers at national, provincial and local levels has been a successful approach to influence policy processes and policymaking. Under the GBV programme outcome referring to dominant social norms protecting girls and women from GBV, and with financial support from the European Union, NCA Pakistan implementing partner South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK) formed two District Watch Groups (DWGs) in Mirpurkhas and Shaheed Benazirabad districts. Members of these DWGs include lawyers, journalists, doctors, teachers, faith leaders and members of civil society organisations. The DWGs have conducted regular meetings with relevant stakeholders to formulate advocacy strategies and have played an important role as watchdog of the Government Department services on violence against women and girls. 18 DWGs meetings were held in Shaheed Benazirabad in 2015 and in Mirpurkhas in 2016 and 2017, for a total of 234 participants (176 men and 58 women). The members of DWGs successfully advocated for the effective implementation of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in Sindh (2013).

Continuous mobilisation and awareness raising by religious leaders in Friday sermons, and meetings with DWGs, resulted in the drafting and approval of the Hindu Marriage Act at national

level in 2017. The official recognition of a Hindu marriage quells issues of legitimacy and inheritance by recognizing that all children born to the marriage are legitimate and establishes a clear line of succession to inheritance. The legislation also ensures that children who were born prior to the passage of the bill are legitimate<sup>3</sup> and it provides for penalties if any of its provisions is violated. While the Province of Sindh had already adopted a similar Act in 2016, the law was adopted by the Punjab, Baluchistan, and KP provincial governments following adoption of the federal law.<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy to highlight that the Hindu Marriage Act is the first law to regulate marriages of Hindus at the federal level. Influenced by the work of SAP-PK, specifically its advocacy initiatives and its networking with CSOs, religious leaders and politicians from various political parties, the Sindh provincial parliament has earlier this year passed a new law amending the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act adopted in 2016. The new Act ensures that Hindu women get documentary proof of their marriages, it allows Hindu widows to remarry of their own free will, provided that a period of six months has lapsed after their husbands' death, and it grants Hindu women the right to file a petition for the termination of their marriages. The amendment addresses vulnerabilities of the Hindu community, especially of widows, that are related to outdated customs and traditions restricting women's rights.

Though the political will from government partners to work on GBV issues remains a big challenge, involvement of CSOs, judiciary, community members and religious leaders through DWGs has contributed to positive results. It was also necessary to mobilise progressive religious leaders as change agents, to avoid a situation where conservative religious leaders would become a threat to the programme.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/pakistan-national-assembly-passes-hindu-marriage-bill/>

<sup>4</sup> Senate passes landmark Hindu marriage bill, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1315482>

PA amends Hindu Marriage Act to give couples right of separation, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410035>

Sindh govt notifies Hindu marriage law, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1777191/1-sindh-govt-notifies-hindu-marriage-law/>

The Sindh Hindus Marriage Act, 2016 - Sindh Assembly, <http://www.pas.gov.pk/uploads/acts/Sindh%20Act%20No.IX%20of%202016.pdf>



World Council of Churches (WCC) gives Pakistani Muslims and Christians a common ground to solve interreligious problems. Muslim leader Nouman Hamid and Bishop (Reverend) Majid Abel are important members of NCA's partner WCC.

**PHOTO:** Håvard Bjelland/Norwegian Church Aid

### Faith-based organisations mobilised to advocate against human trafficking in Malawi

Together with faith-based organisations and civil society organisations, NCA Malawi successfully advocated for 10 years for a new law on *Trafficking of Persons Act* (TIP) which was passed in the Parliament in 2015, followed by a *National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons (2017-2022)* and a TIP fund. NCA partners on the project were: Salvation Army, Rights Advice Centres, Malawi Council of Churches, Evangelical Association of Malawi, the Episcopal Conference of Malawi, Woman Judges Association of Malawi (WOJAM) and the Malawi Network Against Trafficking (MNAT).

Malawi faces high rates of GBV, including human trafficking, as evidenced by various researches. *The National Action Plan to combat GBV in Malawi*<sup>5</sup> identifies all forms of GBV as prevalent in Malawi, includes Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and people living with disabilities and albinism. Malawi is a source, destination and transit country for trafficking. *The National Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons (2017 -2022)*<sup>6</sup> reports an increasing trend of victims rescued, suspects arrested, and convictions made between 2013-2016<sup>7</sup>, but nationally there is a lack of comprehensive data capturing systems. The *2015 Malawi CEDAW Shadow Report*<sup>8</sup> revealed gaps in protection of human rights by the State, specifically on exploitation of women and children in trafficking and the need for support services for survivors.

NCA Malawi has been working on TIP since 2000. The first phase provided awareness on what trafficking entails, followed by a research on TIP in Malawi, which revealed that between 500-1000 women were trafficked in/out of Malawi annually. The second phase focused on prevention, capacity building of key stakeholders (police, local authorities, media, faith and community leaders, judges, parliamentarians) and advocacy for the passing of the TIP law and the third phase lobbied for

a National TIP fund and Action Plan. Faith leaders interacted with victims of trafficking, they participated in dialogues on their role in prevention and responses, and developed training manuals and sermons for the churches addressing GBV and trafficking. Faith-based leaders, engaged in the NCA Human Rights and Theology project, were involved in advocacy for the passing and later implementation of the law, using their church media stations, TV and radios. In 2017, during the TIP International Commemoration Day, the Malawi government invited faith leaders to discuss their role in combating trafficking and launched the National Action Plan. In cooperation with the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, workshops and exchange visits to other SADC countries were undertaken to increase knowledge and share measures to combat trafficking. Dialogues were held between parliamentarians and faith actors to lobby for passing the law. As a result, the law was passed, a national coordination committee was established to oversee the progress of the law and law enforcers are now able to convict perpetrators with stiffer penalties.

Many lessons have been learned. Advocating for a new law can take more time (e.g. 10 years) than originally expected, so working with the government requires patience, sensitivity and potentially longer timelines than projects are designed for. Collaborating with other organisations is key to advocate successfully for law enforcement and implementation as illustrated by the religious leaders' active engagement with MNAT in Malawi. Finally, involvement of religious leaders at all levels, from participation to community meetings, to building a good relationship with the government for successful lobby, turned out to be critical in the development and passing of the new law.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Malawi, Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare: National Plan of Action to Combat Gender Based Violence in Malawi. 2014 – 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Republic of Malawi: National Plan of Action against Trafficking In persons. 2017 – 2022. Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security. Lilongwe 3.

<sup>7</sup> National Child protection office report, Malawi Police Service, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Malawi 2015 Shadow Report. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)



Ms Grace Chiumia, Former Minister of Home Affairs and Internal security sharing the TIP documents with other delegates to the Launch of the NAP. **PHOTO:** Norwegian Church Aid, Malawi

## Sensitizing and building the capacity on GBV of male religious actors

### Sensitizing and building faith leaders' capacities in Pakistan to ensure respect of women and girls' rights in marriages

21% of girls in Pakistan are married before the age of 18. Child marriage in Pakistan is a result of tradition, culture, and customary practices, at times involving the transfer of money, settlement of debts or exchange of daughters (Vani/Swara or Watta Satta) sanctioned by a Jirga or Panchayat (council of elders from the community). The minimum age for marriage is 18 in Sindh Province and 16 in the rest of Pakistan. In 2017, the Parliament amended the Penal Code to curb child marriage by increasing the punishment from five to ten years in prison and a fine of up to 1 million rupees. In addition, Pakistan was among the first States to propose a target to end child marriage by 2030 during discussions of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the Council of Islamic Ideology, a statutory body that advises the Pakistani government on Islamic interpretation of legislation, declared that laws prohibiting child marriage are un-Islamic, a ruling widely criticised by CSOs. Child marriage is just one form of forced marriages prevalent in Pakistan; in Sindh, girls are also forcibly married to the Quran, a life-long vow of abstinence to keep property within the family. Forced conversion has also long been an issue in a Muslim-majority country of nearly 200 million people. It mainly affects Hindus, 2.5% of Pakistan's population with about 90% of them living in Sindh, and Christians who account for another 1.6% of the population.<sup>9</sup> With no confirmed statistics on forced conversions in the country, estimates suggest that at least 1,000 girls and women in Pakistan are forcibly converted to Islam to enter into Muslim marriages every year.<sup>10</sup>

In two provinces of Pakistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) (2 districts in Sindh and 3 districts in KP), NCA and its partners South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK) and Khwendo Kor (KK) have been implementing a project aiming at social change regarding marriage practices with the financial support of the European Union and Norad. In the beginning of the project, resistance from male relatives due to socio-cultural norms and taboos was one of the main challenges facing religious leaders' interventions for change, for example male relatives didn't want religious leaders to interfere in their personal family matters, especially at the moment of Nikkah (Muslim marriage), and relatives refused them to ask for consent to marriage of the bride. Hindu marriages were also performed without the consent of the brides because of the pressure that local feudal exerted over the pundits during marriages.

SAP-PK and KK have sensitized and built the capacities of religious leaders on issues of GBV, and more specifically GBV related to marriage, to enable them to take a stand against discriminative and violent practices. As a result of continuous mobilisation and awareness raising by religious leaders during Friday sermons and community meetings, Nikah Khuwan (Muslim marriage solemnisers) have taken 38 brides' consents to marriage and ensured Haq Maher (dowry money pledged for the bride at the time of marriage ceremony, in case of divorce) for women and girls. In addition, 132 religious leaders and Nikah Khuwan filled in the marriage forms in

their true spirit regarding brides' consent and agreed to take consent of brides during the marriage ceremony itself. 11,070 statements/sermons by religious leaders were delivered to promote women's rights in marriage. In Sindh, 48 women in two districts received their share of inherited property, and 478 cases of forced marriage, inheritance, domestic violence, etc. have been referred to service providers for support and to duty bearers for redress in the 3 targeted districts. 607 cases of child marriages/exchange marriages, domestic violence,

and forced marriages have been prevented and resolved by the partners, with support from religious leaders.

Due to the sensitisation and capacity building of religious leaders, more acceptance from male family members came in the form of not agreeing to early marriages of their daughters or sisters. Involvement of religious leaders and sensitisation carried out at the grass roots level, in light of the religious context of communities, resulted in greater acceptance to the rights of the girl child and to women's rights in marriages.

### In Mali, male religious leaders take public stand against GBV after their capacities are built

In 12 municipalities in Mopti and 6 in Kidal, central and northern regions of Mali, NCA and partners (IAMANEH and SOLISA) have been implementing activities with financial support from Norad in order to contribute to dominant social norms that protect girls and women from GBV. In Mali, as early as 15 years old, about four women out of 10 (38%) suffer from physical violence committed by family member or partner. More than one woman over ten between 15 and 49 years old declares having been victim of sexual violence.<sup>11</sup> Kidal and Mopti regions are characterized by insecurity and high rates of GBV.

To tackle GBV, NCA and partners have taken action to sensitize and build the capacities on GBV of male religious leaders. They have identified 46 Muslim and Christian religious leaders in the regions of Mopti and Kidal who are acting as role models for other religious leaders who are not yet ready to collaborate with the programme or are resistant to change. In the region of Kidal, NCA and partners have trained 16 religious leaders on GBV in 2016 to work on the development of messages based on the Qur'an and Islamic Hadiths promoting and explaining women's rights and the negative consequences of GBV on women's health. These messages have been broadcasted on radio in French and other common languages in the region, namely Tamashek, Sonrai and Arabic. In addition, and to improve ownership, religious leaders are part of the monitoring committee that the program has put in place to ensure continuous follow-up of the program on community level.

As a result, 38% of religious leaders with who the program works in Mopti and Kidal have made public statements against GBV and in favour of change in social norms to protect women and girls in their respective communities. In Mopti, 15 out of the 30 religious leaders the program work with have publicly displayed their opposition against GBV and 7 of them renewed their commitment in the continuation of community information campaigns on the disastrous consequences of GBV. In 2017 in Kidal, 4 out of the 16 religious leaders trained have made public statements against GBV and traditional harmful practices. In the mosque, the issue of early marriage is included in preaches during Friday prayers. The President of the Islamic High Council takes advantage of Islamic meetings to raise awareness about early marriage. Information sessions on GBV through youth campaigns have been conducted by a protestant pastor, reaching out to 800 youths. 3 protestant wedding ceremonies have also served as awareness and information space on FGM for the pastor, reaching out to an average of 750 people. Catholic women meetings have also been key spaces for a male catechist to spread the message against child marriages.

Despite a successful engagement with religious leaders who, for most of them once capacitated on GBV take action against it, the involvement of women, young people and marginalized groups, key actors in the fight against GBV, remains a great challenge due to socio-cultural and security constraints.

<sup>9</sup> Annual Report-NCA Pakistan 2017

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/pakistan-sindh-province-outlaws-forced-conversions-161125053322877.html>



Mumta (17) was rescued from forced marriage some years ago.  
PHOTO: Håvard Bjelland/  
Norwegian Church Aid

<sup>11</sup> 2012/2013 Demographic Health Survey DHS



# Creating support from top religious leadership

## Keeping the momentum, Ethiopian top religious leaders' critical support

In Ethiopia, more than 97% of the population is religious or a follower of a certain religion<sup>12</sup>. In addition to their religious services, religious institutions have been addressing the social needs of the community, whenever need arises. Religious leaders are close to their followers of faith and they are well positioned to influence harmful practices and change social norms upholding these.

NCA Ethiopia has worked for more than one decade with and through religious leaders and faith institutions to end Female Genital Mutilations (FGM) and other forms of GBV. Since 2011, NCA has partnered with the Inter Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE), an umbrella organization for seven faith-based organisations. The IRCE is positioned to bring on board top religious leaders together for policy dialogue. With the support of the Norwegian government, UNFPA and UNICEF, more than 30 high-level national and regional level interfaith dialogue forums were conducted on ending FGM, GBV and other harmful practices where joint statement and commitments were developed with clear commitments.

***“We religious fathers and leaders will seriously teach that female genital mutilation, early marriage, abduction and related harmful practices committed against women have severe consequences on the lives of our daughters, sisters and mothers and have no support in any religious teaching. We have reached at an agreement for religious admonition to be administered on all people committing the practices in violation of the call.”***

Joint statement IRCE, 2011 September

To this end, more than 500,000 religious leaders and faith communities were directly reached through messages of ending FGM while 10 million faith communities were reached through faith printed and electronic media. In 2014, during the Global Girls' summit in London, the Ethiopian government made a commitment to end FGM and child marriage by 2025. In 2015, the government held its first National Girls' Summit in Ethiopia where NCA presented a publication compiling FBOs engagement on FGM and the IRCE officially announced its support to the national commitment to end child marriage and FGM. The IRCE specifically committed to establish a national level multi-faith platform task group; to track results, facilitate sharing of lessons among faith-based organisations and foster collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and the National Alliance to End FGM and Early Marriage; to target 50% of faith-based run schools and health facilities of the Ethiopian Muslims Development Agency, the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus to address early marriage and FGM; to target 80% of FBOs Women, Youth and Children desks to include issues of FGM and child marriage; and to incorporate FGM and early marriage in curriculums of 50% of theology colleges, Qur'anic and Bible schools. Following above commitments,

the IRCE established task forces in ten regional states and city administrations. The national task force, together with IRCE, is expected to work closely with the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM, identify capacity building needs of the national and regional task forces, facilitate trainings, experience sharing, monitoring and evaluation, and support the regional task forces during planning and implementation. The regional task forces have the responsibility to design plans, share responsibilities and monitor progress. They also identify best practices in relation to child marriage and FGM, facilitate learning forums, and contribute in different national and regional events on FGM and child marriage. Since 2015, NCA documents FBOs annual engagement on FGM and Child marriage and reports during the consecutive annual Girls' Summits.

Despite evident good results, there have been some challenges. There is limited capacity of faith leaders, particularly in rural areas, to track results and monitor progresses. Due to the vast geographic area and the big population size, cascading high level commitments has become a challenge, but getting the buy-in from top religious leaders is critical to make the cascading of messages easier.

12 Central Statistics Agency, Population Census, 2007

PHOTO: Hilina Abebe/Norwegian Church Aid, Ethiopia



## Facilitating interfaith platforms and material

### Facilitating interfaith platforms and material in Eastern DRC

Eastern DRC continues to be defined as a conflict/post-conflict setting that is marked by insecurity and instability. Women and girls are greatly affected by both the ongoing conflict and gender-based inequalities in their communities, and are often victims of GBV. Social norms that are not conducive to gender equality combined with retrograde customs and traditions are among the main factors contributing to the exclusion of women from decision making processes. Within the religious sphere, misinterpretation of sacred texts (Bible and Quran) is also a key factor. Legal frameworks to change social norms exist, but the implementation of laws and rights is lacking at both local and national levels. NCA DRC works in partnership with two provincial faith-based platforms, namely Interfaith Platform North Kivu and Interfaith Platform South Kivu, on GBV prevention and protection in order to reduce gender-based violence through promoting social norms protecting girls and women from GBV.

NCA has collaborated with FECCLAHA to establish the two interfaith platforms in North and South Kivu, composed of religious leaders issued from various Christian and Muslim congregations, and to build the capacities of members of these platforms, especially on the Tamar Campaign. The Tamar Campaign is an approach used to address sensitive topics related to GBV and patriarchal structures through contextualised Bible studies whereby people are made aware of the reality of inequalities between men and women in the community. It is based on the interpretation of sacred texts and analysis of social constructs, in order to address sexual and gender-based violence.

As a result, faith-based actors are encouraged and mobilised to play an active role in addressing gender-based injustices and discriminatory and harmful traditional beliefs. In areas where NCA works with faith-based actors, sexual and gender-based violence is no longer a taboo. Survivors break the silence, daring to denounce perpetrators. The approach also enables collective

awareness on the rights of women and girls and progressive change of mentality. According to an evaluation conducted on the Tamar campaign, men and women who participated in contextualized Bible group studies reported a positive change in their perceptions regarding gender. There is an increased understanding that school is for both boys and girls. Men that have learned about gender equity and women's rights reported change in their attitudes towards women. More than 15,000 people (50% female) have been sensitized on girls and women rights. Conjugal dialogue has improved and there is a reduction of conflict and violence and more harmony in households. Women members of Tamar Circles play a visible role in their constituencies, including conducting Sunday services once a month.

Religious leaders, together through Interfaith platforms, are undisputed vectors of social change, and through the Tamar campaign, collaboration between confessional members of Interfaith platforms has been enhanced. Faith-based actors have the ability to respond to the needs of both GBV survivors and perpetrators, and through the Tamar Campaign, Interfaith platforms have the capacity for mass mobilization with limited financial means. However cultural barriers, doctrinal differences and doctrinal resistances persist. Christians and believers in general remain reluctant to gender equality due to evangelization that was truncated from the start and on which inequalities between men and women are based. The changes of attitude and ways of thinking takes time. Financial resources for the dissemination of the Campaign remain insufficient due to geographic constraints and armed conflict. In addition to cultural and doctrinal resistance to changes, volunteering is a discouraging factor for engaging religious leaders. Finally, the overall climate of impunity prevailing in the country is an obstacle to accountability.

### The don'ts of engaging with faith actors on GBV

1. Do not dictate the agenda, do not provoke nor impose ideas. Rather than forcing an issue on faith actors, introduce the issue and let time and space for the religious community to discuss and own it.
2. Do not discuss religious doctrine if not agreed. Instead, sensitize and build the capacities of faith actors on the issue and give them time and space to discuss the religious doctrine between themselves.
3. Do not use culturally inappropriate communication. Analyse the context: is it individual-based or community-based? Are religion and culture affecting each other? Based on your analysis, adapt your communication and use local languages and words as much as possible.
4. Do not work with one and only faith actor in an area where multiple faith and faith actors are represented. Favour interfaith engagement.
5. Do not bypass religious leadership. Faith structures are often hierarchical, so you must build a relationship with the top leadership and ensure their buy-in before implementing any initiative that will involve their structures.

## SAVE LIVES AND SEEK JUSTICE

**Norwegian Church Aid** works to save lives and seek justice. Our support is provided unconditionally with no intention of influencing anyone's religious beliefs and affiliation.

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**Norwegian Church Aid** works through an integrated and rights-based approach with:

- Long-term development
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- ACT Alliance Code of Conduct
- Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (1994)
- The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, the Sphere Project
- IASC Gender Handbook and Gender Marker
- Do No Harm

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