

## EVIDENCE BRIEF 3

The Secretary General's report *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility* recognises the unprecedented challenges presented by current humanitarian crises and calls for 'accepting and acting upon our individual and shared responsibilities [to] be the central theme

of the World Humanitarian Summit'. The report identifies five core responsibilities that will be the focus of discussion and proposed action. The JLIF&LC – in support of the WHS Special Event on Humanitarianism and Religious Engagement – has prepared evidence briefs linked to each of these commitments. Each brief summarises key evidence regarding the role of local faith communities (LFCs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) with respect to that responsibility, provides links to key research and documentation, and highlights significant issues and strategies for dialogue to secure more effective engagement with religious actors in this area.



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## Faith communities are key actors in empowering and protecting girls and addressing gender-based violence

### CORE RESPONSIBILITY 3: Leave No One Behind

This responsibility recognises that honouring the international community's commitment under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind requires reaching everyone in situations of conflict, disasters, vulnerability and risk. This involves working to reduce internal displacement, address large-scale movements of refugees and end statelessness. However, building on the work of the JLIF&LC Learning Hub on Gender-Based Violence, this brief particularly addresses the call to '**empower and protect women and girls**, including through equal participation in decision-making, access to livelihoods and sexual and reproductive health services' and '**eradicate sexual and gender-based violence and treat survivors with dignity**'.

Gender-based violence (GBV) often increases during times of conflict and crisis. This not only violates the human rights of women and girls but also, through fear and intimidation, can reduce their participation in society which is so vital for humanitarian response. Yet less than 0.5 per cent of humanitarian funding is committed to addressing gender-based violence. Of further concern, approaches seldom sufficiently address harmful religious and cultural beliefs and practices contributing to GBV.

Faith groups are an important part of civil society, for religions have a unique ability to promote stability, cohesion and solidarity. The social ties formed within faith communities are an essential part of community infrastructure

and sense of belonging.<sup>1</sup> In times of upheaval and drastic social change there is a greater need for social cohesion and institutions that can actively contribute to community solidarity.<sup>2</sup> Moments of social upheaval can also be opportunities to challenge harmful norms that contribute to GBV. Being members of a faith group provides emotional, spiritual and physical resources that can be crucial in the prevention of violence and provision of diverse forms of support for survivors. This paper provides examples of positive engagement with religious networks and faith leaders in preventing and responding to various forms of GBV including sexual and intimate partner violence occurring in conflict settings.

<sup>1</sup> Ammerman, N.T. *Congregation & Community*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1997, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> Ter Haar, G. *How God became African: African spirituality and Western secular thought*. Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2009, p. 23.

*Women have long observed that “the personal is political” and, for me, the political quest for gender justice and an end to conflict-related sexual violence is also deeply personal. As both a Muslim and a women’s rights activist, I recognise that every step forward for women’s rights is also a small victory in the fight against fundamentalism. This conviction is reinforced by the Islamic values that guide my life, namely: respect for humanity, tolerance, and protection of the vulnerable.*

**UN Special Representative for Girls, Zainab Bangura**

### The relationship between faith, culture and gender is complex

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These

acts can occur in public or in private.<sup>3</sup> Patriarchy and its resultant notions of gender inequality are arguably the biggest drivers of GBV. In order to influence the fundamental societal norms, beliefs and practices that result from patriarchy, people with influence and credibility are needed to challenge the harmful norms and champion alternatives. Faith leaders are such people, and are important gatekeepers into a community.<sup>4</sup>

Tearfund’s Men, *Faith and Masculinities* studies in Rwanda, Burundi and DR Congo found strong linkage between scriptural understandings and perspectives on gender: *“When we were growing up we learnt from our culture that women were inferior to us. Even though we feel this is wrong in our current context we still hear sermons that teach the same thing.”*<sup>5</sup>

However the relationship between faith, culture and gender is complex. Faith leaders may promote GBV-conducive behaviours through the teaching of patriarchal interpretations of holy scriptures. It is important to work with faith leaders, then, not only to harness their influence and authority for GBV

prevention and response, but also to stop them from facilitating GBV through their teachings.

Faith groups are present at the grassroots, all over the world, and are respected as insiders in the communities they serve.<sup>1</sup> This allows them to better challenge negative cultural gender norms that underpin GBV without being dismissed and ignored as outsiders. Faith leaders know the culture of the community and are aware of possible sensitive issues, and thus they can package GBV interventions in community-appropriate ways.<sup>6</sup> By being part of the community, a faith group can impact and influence the entire community, for it is the community’s own members who drive the shift in social norms and practices.



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Baroness Anelay and David Gressly visit a Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative project beneficiary in Bweremana, North Kivu.

### Case Study: The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (JP FGM/C)

*“The JP places particular emphasis on reaching out to religious and traditional leaders because of the tremendous influence they exert on the mores of the community. During Phase I the JP has supported the establishment of partnerships of religious leaders and other traditional groups opposed to FGM/C. In an effort to channel their opposition to the practice, the JP supported these networks in issuing “edicts”, defined as “public announcements, statements made by religious leaders during their preaching, awareness sessions, conferences, seminars, debates on television, or other media, or Fatwas”. Engagement with religious leaders was a prominent feature of the work in nearly all Joint Programme countries and is a strategy which continues to serve the Programme’s objectives. A total of 4095 religious and traditional leaders made public declarations delinking FGM/C from religion. Furthermore, 730 edicts were issued in support of abandonment in eight of the JP’s target countries in 2012.”*

### Given their influence it is vital to engage with religious leaders for GBV prevention

Faith leaders are seen as moral authorities, providers of spiritual guidance, and have legitimacy within communities. Communities often expect faith leaders to guide their thinking, knowledge, norms, attitudes and behaviours. The literature documents that faith leaders

are important, authoritative people in local communities. Faith leaders have reach and influence within the community<sup>8</sup> and can therefore be valuable champions for GBV prevention: ‘They have relationships and reputation already established in the community and are known and often trusted by the people...This creates space for members to be inspired toward action around

<sup>3</sup> IASC. Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience an aiding recovery, 2015, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> le Roux, E. (2015) See Key Sources.

<sup>5</sup> Tearfund. *Transforming Masculinities: Great Lakes Region Summary Report: Social attitudes and practices of men in relation to gender*. Available: [www.tearfund.org/sexualviolence](http://www.tearfund.org/sexualviolence)

<sup>6</sup> Benhke, A.O., Ames, N., & Hancock, T.U. What Would They Do? Latino Church Leaders and Domestic Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2012, 27(7): 1259-1275.

<sup>7</sup> UNFPA. Overview of inter-religious and intercultural activities. New York, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Strickland, G.A., Welshimer, K. I. & Sarvela, P.D. Clergy perspectives and practices regarding intimate violence: a rural view. *The Journal of Rural Health*, 1998, 14(4): 305-311.

GBV, facilitating movements that come “from us” because “this is OUR issue and we took action!” -this type of ownership is the only source of true sustainable cultural change in a community. To see systems and prolific cultural practices that allow and encourage GBV change we need community champions that are willing to be and bring this change.<sup>4</sup>

Faith leaders know the culture of the community, are aware of sensitive issues, and are thus potentially in a strong position to address GBV in contextually appropriate ways. Training and accompaniment in sifting through holy scriptures and traditions is a key means of capitalizing on this potential for challenging misconception and misinformation.<sup>4,9</sup>

To prevent interventions from being stifled or side-lined it is important to work with all levels of leadership within the faith community/group structure. ‘Faith leader’ must not be defined too narrowly. These are not only the heads of faith communities. It is important to engage faith leaders that are not of the clerical class, as the clerical class at times represent the *status quo* and can hinder change. Alternative faith leaders working within service sectors, academia and so on are often highly regarded, may be less constrained by the need to maintain patriarchal religious authority, and this better able to develop and proclaim alternative voices. Faith and NGO partnerships can offer safe spaces for religious leaders and other faith-inspired actors to engage on these issues, away from the confines of their formal religious institutions or structures.

*There used to be a lack of understanding within the community about violence against women, it was accepted as a fact of life. Now this is changing. I am determined to fight. We try to inform others. This is a struggle as we have to deal with violence in our families, our churches, and our communities, but still we try to teach survivors to come forward and seek help.*

**Mama Yvonne, Kibumba, DRC**

#### Case Study: Faith-based GBV Support in DRC<sup>10</sup>

*Engaging with faith leaders and groups, this project established a Community Action Group (CAG) in 2014 to tackle incidences of sexual violence in Kibumba. The group’s function was to advocate against sexual violence, mobilise faith and community leaders to speak out against sexual violence, support victims and survivors of sexual violence and work with men and boys to promote the idea of positive masculinity. The project has worked with over one hundred local faith leaders to help them better understand sexual violence and survivors’ needs, including the basic principles of psycho-social care support, the local legal framework and how to access justice. Between January 2014 and February 2015, 142 survivors of sexual violence were helped to access medical services, 43 were referred to the local police or for judicial follow-up, and 12 benefited from family mediation.*

#### Case Study: Equip-Liberia Mission Alliance Sexual Violence Project<sup>13</sup>

*Precious, a 28 year old woman from Nimba county, was living in an abusive relationship with a 30 year old male. She was constantly beaten after which she was forced to have sex. Eventually Precious reported the case to the police who arrested the husband and sent him to court. The court tried to set the husband free knowing that she didn’t have the financial means to fight the case nor did she have contacts with important persons. Local church members who had been trained on GBV issues helped provide advocacy at, and financial support for, the court hearings; witness transport; and counselling and psychosocial support for Precious. The court sentenced Precious’s husband to a custodial sentence in prison.*

#### Faith communities can provide key support to GBV survivors

Local faith communities can provide valuable safe spaces and faith leaders can be valuable allies for survivors. Survivor needs assessment across five countries in sub-Saharan Africa indicated that survivors expect faith communities to be places of safety and support even though they did not necessarily find this to be the reality.<sup>11</sup> In Central African Republic, throughout the conflict people saw places of worship as places of refuge. Faith leaders became de facto first responders in Bangui.

Faith communities are particularly vital when operating in fragile contexts during ongoing conflict. In DRC trained GBV champions were able to provide an immediate emergency response when remote communities were attacked by armed militia in October 2015; as a result several women and children who were raped gained access to medical care, including PEP treatment, in time.<sup>10</sup>

Faith communities can provide practical support like counseling, shelter, accompaniment to medical care for survivors, mobilising and advocating for other key institutions to do the same.<sup>12</sup> As leaders of their community, faith leaders can advocate for justice for survivors as well.

<sup>9</sup> Petersen, E. Addressing Domestic Violence: Challenges Experienced by Anglican Clergy in the Diocese of Cape Town, South Africa. *Social Work & Christianity*, 2009, 36(4):449-469.

<sup>10</sup> Tearfund. Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative. Project Report, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> JLIF&LC GBV Learning Hub Report. Available [www.jliflc.com](http://www.jliflc.com)

<sup>12</sup> <http://tracks.unhcr.org/2015/06/yazidi-women-welcomed-back-to-the-faith/>

<sup>13</sup> Equip-Liberia Mission Alliance SVP Report, 2016.

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## Core Commitments and Key Actions

WHS Core Commitments<sup>14</sup> relevant to aspects of the core responsibility to 'Leave No One Behind' considered in this brief include:

**Commitment 1:** Empower Women and Girls as change agents and leaders, including by increasing support for local women's groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action.

**Commitment 3:** Implement a coordinated global approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in crisis contexts, including through the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies.

**Commitment 5:** Fully comply with humanitarian policies, and legally binding documents related to gender equality, women's empowerment, and women's rights.

The evidence reviewed regarding local faith communities and faith-based organisations suggests the following Key Actions in support of these commitments. These build on the 2015 We Will Speak Out (WWSO) - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Interfaith Summit on ending sexual violence that included a Declaration by religious leaders committing to zero tolerance of GBV and creating safe spaces for survivors:

**1. Improve the quality of cooperation between faith-based organizations and secular agencies and actors**, making concerted efforts to find commonalities in language, aspirations and ways of working.

**2. Develop strategic partnerships to support female and male faith leaders** and their communities in addressing harmful cultures, beliefs, attitudes and practices and support the development of non-violent masculinities based on faith traditions.

**3. Partner with and equip religious leaders to raise awareness and respond practically** in the implementation of the 'International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict' and the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies

**4. Involve faith groups in community-based referral pathways**, document and disseminate examples of good practice and promote linkages between service providers and faith groups including those concerned with HIV and AIDS

**5. Build evidence for faith-based responses and prevention of GBV** through rigorous evaluation of programme interventions and commissioning of research studies on programme impact.

## Key Sources

le Roux, Elizabeth (2015) *A scoping study on the role of faith communities and organisations in prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence: Implications for policy and practice*. Stellenbosch University and JLIF&LC. Available: <http://gender-based-violence.jliflc.com/>

UNFPA, World Vision and AP-WFD (2013). *A Mapping of Faith-based Responses to Violence against Women and Girls in the Asia-Pacific Region*. <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/mapping-faith-based-responses-violence-against-women-and-girls-asia-pacific-region>

The JLIF&LC has collated all submissions made during the course of WHS consultation related to religion and faith at: <http://jliflc.com/world-humanitarian-summit-resources/>

A fuller annotated bibliography on sources relevant to the engagement of local faith communities in humanitarian response is available at: <http://jliflc.com/resources/the-evidence-base-faith-religion-and-humanitarian-action-annotated-bibliography/>

This evidence brief was drafted on behalf of the JLIF&LC GBV Hub by Helen Stawski (Islamic Relief Worldwide), Veena O'Sullivan (Tearfund), Elizabeth Dartnall (SVRI), Shereen el Feki (University of Toronto), Diana Jimena Arango (World Bank) and Azza Karam (UNFPA). The views expressed are those of the drafting team alone and do not represent the formal position of the JLIF&LC or any of its affiliated organisations.

<sup>14</sup> Full, updated details are available on the WHS site at <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/summit/roundtables>