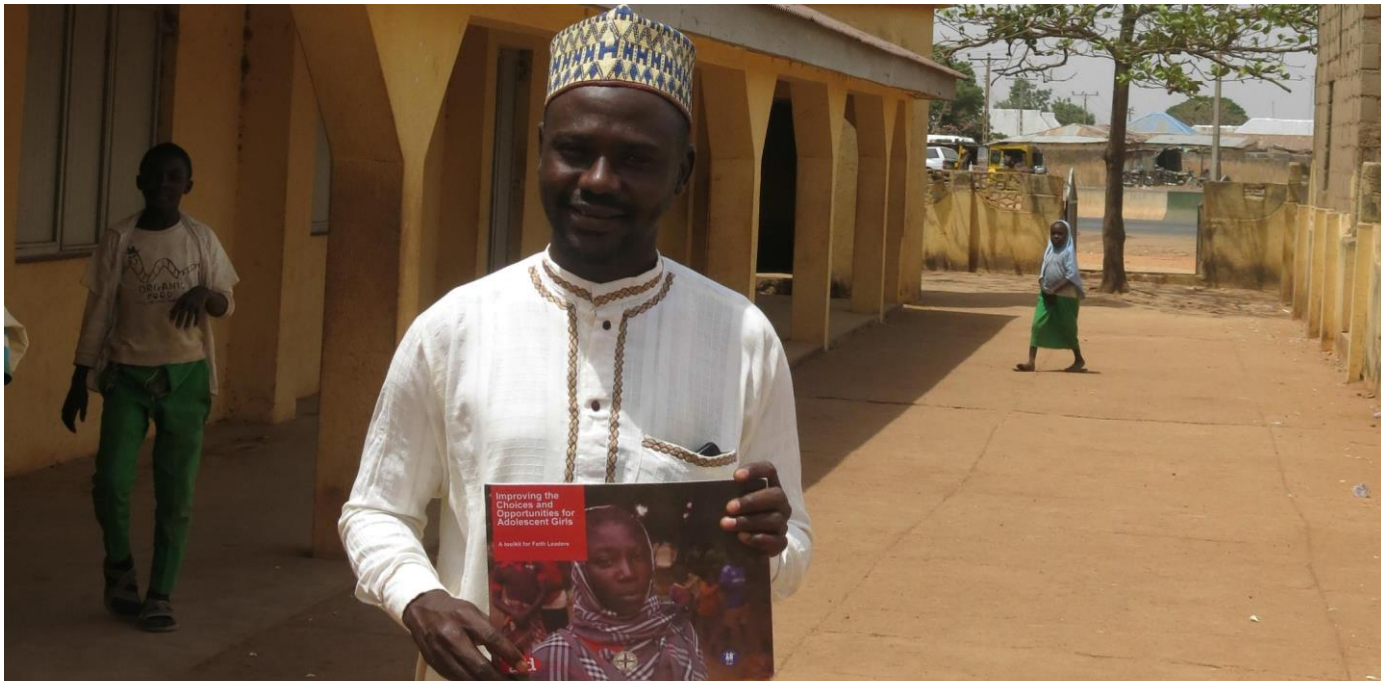


Raising male champions for adolescent girls

A CAAGI story of change | March 2017



Imam Sani is one of the male champions (men and boys) trained on gender and adolescent girls' issues who are actively campaigning for behaviour change among their peers. A toolkit has been produced to help faith leaders to use scripture to back up their messages

About Collective Action for Adolescent Girls (CAAGI)

CAAGI is a two-year pilot project structured to work with faith actors and faith based organisations to improve the choices and opportunities for adolescent girls to live a productive and meaningful life.

The project seeks to advocate against religious and cultural norms limiting adolescent girls' development.

Location: Kaduna state, Nigeria.

Duration: April 2016 - March 2018

Funded by: Christian Aid

Partners: Development and Peace Initiative (DPI) and Gender Awareness Trust (GAT).

Opening up discussions about girls

'Before the project, I knew this was an issue. It was a known issue, but no one was talking about it because it was a taboo subject. Now, aside from talking about it in the mosque, there is a forum where people go to talk about the issues, so they are becoming more enlightened because they not just hearing about it from the mosque alone but there is a place where they can all sit and talk about it,' says Imam Mohammed Sani about the issues of education that adolescent girls face.

Imam Sani is the Chief Imam of Sabon Gayan mosque and the owner of an Islamiyya¹ school in the community where he has now employed teachers to teach mainstream education subjects to the children; including English language, mathematics and primary science. His remains the only

Islamiyya school in the community to do this explains Rabi'u Dauda, one of the Islamiyya teachers in the school. As an educator himself, Imam Sani is using his access to the PTA² and SBMC³ platforms to raise the issues of adolescent girls to his peers and members of the community, becoming a champion for the cause of adolescent girl education in Sabongayan. He says:

'They are our future mothers, we should place emphasis on their issues.'

He became involved with the project in May 2016 during the mobilisation of religious leaders to lead the change in behaviours and attitudes of people within their spheres of influence. The decision to participate actively however came after he confirmed that the project goals were not against his

religion or culture. Knowing that his religion permits girls to go to school, his involvement with the project's activities enabled him to devise approaches to address the issues of lack of access to education for adolescent girls; something he had never paid any mind to in the past.

Breaking barriers

These approaches as he describes them have helped to break the perceived barrier that existed in even discussing such issues in the community. He knew these issues existed, but could not talk about them because of the lack of knowledge about his potential to address them. His involvement with CAAGI however served as a revelation, giving him insights about why these are issues that need to be addressed, as well as how he as a religious leader can address them. He now preaches in the mosque about creating opportunities for girls to access education.

'What I do is on Fridays in the mosque during prayer, I place a lot of emphasis on the value of the girl child. I spend more time talking about the girl child than every other thing, and I encourage parents to place more value on the girl child,' he said.

Most significantly, he backs everything with scriptures from the Quran, saying: 'if the scripture says you should pay attention to the girl, why should she not be educated, why should she be the one to go and hawk while her brother is going to school, why should she be the one to be denied an education and made to marry early, and people are beginning to question those practices.'

The CAAGI activities he has been a part of such as the development of the faith leaders' toolkit has provided a useful platform for him to interact and share experiences and ideas with other faith leaders.

Changes in attitude and behaviour

Having an adolescent girl as a wife himself, Imam Sani's decision to actively pursue the goals of the project has influenced his personal life,

demonstrating an increase in understanding and change in attitude as he is committed to sending her to school.

In addition, due to a recent personal experience, he recognises the importance of education beyond what the traditional Islamiyya provides in achieving economic empowerment and preserving dignity as children grow older. There are 250 children between the ages of 3 and 20 in his Islamiyya, and less than half of them have ever attended mainstream educational facilities. This limits their level of economic empowerment and continues the cycle of poverty that prevents individuals from fulfilling their potential. As Imam Sani says:

'Parents would rather prefer for their child to go out hawking; the excuse they use is they don't have money to eat, that they are poor and the girl child will have to go out to source for money for them to eat. Any parent that allows their girl child go to school it ends after secondary school, the reason is because they feel she should go and get married and they do not have money to further her education. Everything all boils down to poverty. Boys also face the same issue but not as prevalent as the girls because sometimes the boys they are able to go further and learn a trade but the girls suffer it more.'

Sabongayan community clearly demonstrates the link between the three issues being addressed by CAAGI, showing that it is a continuous cycle of limited opportunities and choices for girls if there is no change. However, Imam Sani has demonstrated that attitudes can be changed. Rabiou Dauda explains that other teachers were employed as a 'contribution to help parents because they cannot afford their [children's] education'. The decision, according to him, was taken because of the involvement in CAAGI.



Empowering adolescent girls for action

17-year-old Amina Salisu's (pictured with Imam Sani above) decision to go back to school and speak against her planned marriage in 2016 was inspired by the teachings of Imam Sani.

One of Imam's Islamiyya students, Amina, sought help from him when he began to relay his learning from the CAAGI activities in the Islamiyya. He helped her convince her family to let her go back to school.

Armed with the information that junior secondary school education is free, Amina took the entrance examination for secondary school, and is currently in the first year of Junior Secondary School (J.S.S. 1).

She hopes to go beyond junior secondary school if the funds are available.

¹ Islamiyya: where children receive Islamic education; ² PTA: Parents, Teachers Association; ³ SBMC: School Based Management Committee