

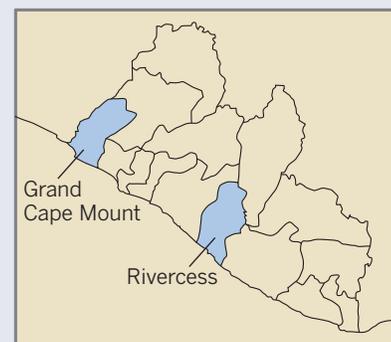


Engaging Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Women and Girls in Liberia 2015-2017: A Program Model Case Study

The Power of Religion to End Violence Against Women and Girls

Liberia's history of widespread violence during 14 years of civil war combined with deeply rooted gender inequality has left the country with one of the highest rates of violence against women and girls (VAW/G) in the world. Nationally, 44% of women ages 15-49 report experiencing physical violence since age 15 and 28.9% report physical violence in the past year. Sexual violence is similarly high: 17.6% of women report experiencing it in their lifetime and 8.7% report sexual violence in the past year. 10% of women also report that their first sexual experience was forced.¹ These numbers – likely underreported – reflect both the dominance and control men have over women and girls, as well as the normalization of VAW/G in Liberian communities.

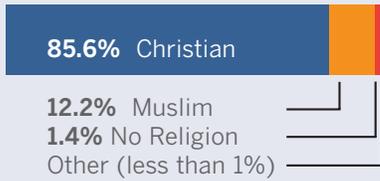
Liberia's religious leaders and institutions have often reinforced the harmful norms and attitudes that contribute to VAW/G, both by appropriating holy texts to justify gender inequality, and by choosing to preserve the privacy and reputations of families over a responsibility to protect women and girls. Yet religious institutions and leaders not only have the moral mandate to address VAW/G, they are uniquely positioned to prevent and respond to it. They help



¹ Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2007 (Liberia 2007 DHS).

Faith Community in Liberia

Based on a population of 4.7 million



Source: Liberia 2015 International Religious Freedom Report. United States Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

Liberia ranked 150 out of 159 on the Gender Inequality Index (2015)

6 TARGET DISTRICTS

945 FAITH LEADERS REACHED WITH TOOLKIT TRAININGS

8,300 MEMBERS OF CHURCHES AND MOSQUES REACHED BY FAITH LEADER VAW/G MESSAGES

244 YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

1,496 YOUTH REACHED THROUGH TRAININGS, EVENTS AND MESSAGING

41 SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE SUPPORTED BY PROGRAM

356,034 PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH VAW/G RADIO MESSAGES

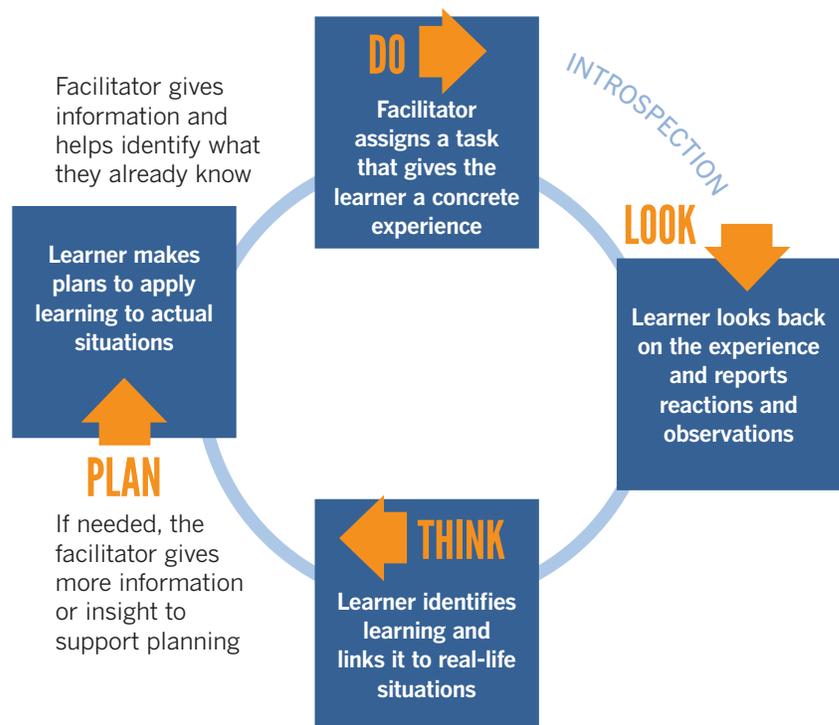
33,977 PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH DRAMA AND OTHER AWARENESS EVENTS

shape social norms and behaviors within their communities, including those that perpetuate VAW/G. Their work routinely involves delivering messages about morality that influence private behavior within the home, and they frequently engage in family life through ceremonies, counseling and other pastoral services.

Bringing Faith Leaders To The Fight Against VAW/G

The Experiential Learning Model (ELM)

The Faith Leader GBV Toolkit uses the ELM to help participants begin deconstructing their own conceptions of gender and power. ELM's 4-step learning process – self-identification, reflection, analysis and action – is incorporated into each activity in the Toolkit and gradually guides trainees through the self-examination needed to begin shifting long-held views about men, women, power dynamics, fairness, justice and more. This process of introspection deepens as the Toolkit moves from broader concepts to more specific, complex topics, allowing participants to revise foundational beliefs and norms around gender and equality before tackling challenging topics such as justification of violence within marriage. Faith leaders trained using the ELM attest to the evolution of their thinking and actions as they progressed through the Toolkit, and that the opportunity and time to delve deeply into and reevaluate their beliefs has changed their pastoral work permanently.

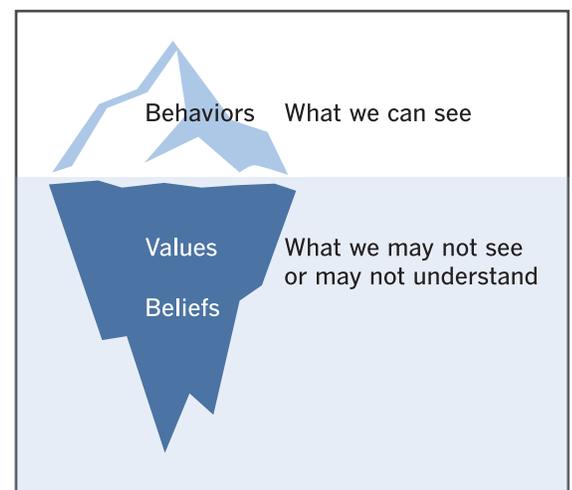




The Power of Scripture to End VAW/G

In contrast to programs that seek to partner with faith leaders as a means of delivering pre-set messages often designed without their input or full buy-in, this program anticipated that interventions focused on changing long-held beliefs about gender and power would need to be designed, contextualized and piloted with strong leadership and theological guidance from senior faith leaders. Because the program sought to change the underlying values and beliefs about men, women and power from which harmful gender attitudes and behaviors were rooted, faith leaders who would serve as trainers would first need to believe in the intrinsic value of gender equality themselves before serving as credible and persuasive mentors to their colleagues. Further, to counter the long-standing use of religious texts for justifying or excusing the mistreatment of women and girls, training materials would need to provide participants with the opportunity to reexamine and re-purpose sacred texts from the Bible and Qur'an to reflect more equitable messaging that emphasized respect, responsibility and dignity.

The Faith Leader GBV Toolkit – designed by Episcopal Relief & Development based on a review and adaption of existing tools and activities in the development community – was extensively tested and revised Muslim and Christian scholars of the TWG to ensure the training would be effective in helping participants understand their own roles in perpetuating VAW/G, as well as believe in the anti-VAW/G and pro-equality messages they would espouse. Faith leaders held introductory and informational meetings with the IRCL and formed the program's interfaith TWG, which was tasked with identifying passages in both the Qu'ran and the Bible frequently used to diminish and devalue women, as well as other passages that spoke to men and women's responsibilities to each other. These passages were discussed, debated, defended and ultimately re-interpreted to reflect values and principles that promoted dignity, mutual





respect and honor. Faith leaders were able to experiment with different activities, theological opinions, and holy texts from a variety of sources before selecting the most effective faith-based arguments promoting gender equality. They also spent time understanding how to facilitate learning and how it varies from preaching and teaching. 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 the common purpose in each religion for promoting the fair and just treatment of others. The personal commitment of faith leaders also inspired congregants. For example, in one mosque, young girls formally kept out of school are now enrolled.

The TWG's engagement with the training content allowed them to undertake their own personal journey and develop increased self-awareness to create a real sense of commitment and personal connection to the issue. It helped them develop a toolkit that was their own, gain skills in tackling views that opposed gender equality, and grow to be passionate trainers. The dynamic process of shaping the Toolkit also continued as the program was implemented, as faith leaders met regularly in County Coalitions to share achievements and problem solve on the effectiveness of the training.

Engaging Youth In Violence Prevention And Response

The program helped youth engage in VAW/G advocacy by training them in gender equality, advocacy and social and behavior change communication (SBCC) tools. For example, youth were trained in FAMA and SBCC tools such as radio and community theater to help them serve as VAW/G advocates in their communities. They used their training to speak out publicly on gender inequality at annual 16 Days of Activism events, during community drama skits and at school presentations. Youth participating in the program also had opportunities to develop leadership skills through roles in faith-based Youth Coalitions and School GBV Committees.

The program encouraged trained youth to find specific actions they could take to reduce VAW/G in their schools and communities. They chose to tackle the National Teacher Code

of Conduct (CoC), a national school policy meant to provide students with a violence-free environment but which was largely unknown and unenforced. Equipped by the program with information and skills to hold schools accountable for protecting their rights, trained youth taught students about their rights, created School GBV Committees and organized student dialogues with school staff, parents and community leaders. They also publicly spoke out on the need for enforcement of the CoC, including by national and local governments. These efforts resulted in most target schools publicly posting the CoC on school campuses, as well as engagement of government leadership in efforts to enforce the CoC. School committees and administrators are also beginning to take action against those who violate the CoC.

Engaging Stakeholders For A Coordinated Response

As in much of Liberia, Grand Cape Mount and Rivercess Counties have minimal government, NGO or CSO programs or services addressing VAW/G. Government structures lack adequate resources to deliver essential services and most of the populations in these counties have little access to health, law enforcement or legal/judicial services. Program efforts to provide safe and confidential support to survivors via hotlines and shelters through existing structures have therefore faced numerous challenges. In response, some faith leaders have developed a less formal response, for example establishing their own hotline by providing communities with their personal phone numbers and receiving several calls each week; or personally assisting and accompanying survivors in accessing whatever services may be available. The program established two safe houses for survivors, one in each county, which have provided survivors' temporary shelter, basic care and accompaniment to other needed services, as well as helped raise visibility of the issue among other stakeholders.



Efforts to develop a public-private partnership to address VAW/G have begun. The TWG, comprised of national faith leaders and members of the IRCL, is currently transitioning from an advisory group to a more formal mechanism, allowing it to better engage with other national-level actors, as well as introduce the Faith Leader GBV Toolkit training to other faith bodies. It will also continue engaging with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and other represented Ministries through participation in County and National GBV Task Forces and survivor support coordination. Anecdotal evidence indicates that government service providers, particularly local police, have been motivated by program VAW/G efforts and faith leaders are now working with them to improve services and coordination.

Impact

An evaluation of the program included baseline and endline quantitative surveys with Christian and Muslim clergy and lay leaders; male and female members of churches and mosques; and women and girl survivors of violence. FGDs were conducted at endline only, with national and county faith leaders; youth from youth coalitions, drama groups and School GBV Committees; and women and girls members of churches and mosques. The baseline and endline surveys were conducted in the two program counties and the endline also included a non-intervention area, Montserrado County, to serve as a control.

Evaluation results showed a remarkable 16% reduction in physical and sexual violence in intervention counties, reducing from 24.2% at baseline to 4% at endline. Quantitative and qualitative findings point to faith-leaders' influence on this reduction. The program also successfully increased women and girls' knowledge of existing support services for survivors of violence, and how to access them. By the end of the project, 62% of female congregants confirmed they learned about services from faith leaders, a ten-fold increase from baseline. 75% of community members (both male and female) knew where to seek services, compared to 28% at baseline. 70-78% (depending on age and gender) of congregants identified faith leaders as a source of support to women and girls who had experienced violence. Women also acknowledged faith leaders and County Task Force members' role in improving links with law enforcement and in reducing bribery.

Findings also show that faith leaders are internalizing gender equality concepts and addressing them in their work. For example, at endline 80% of congregants reported hearing at least one clergy member speak out publicly against VAW/G, compared to 38% at baseline. 74% of congregants recognized and trusted faith leaders to prevent or respond to violence by the end of the intervention, compared to 27% at baseline.

The evaluation also showed that 97% of youth leaders involved with the program are speaking out publicly against VAW/G, compared to 29% at baseline; and that 81% also took action by providing support or referrals to members of their church or mosque.

Replication And Sustainability

The program was committed to short- and long-term sustainability throughout its design and implementation decisions. In the short-term, groups established by the program – including the IRCL TWG, Youth Coalitions, drama groups, School GBV Committees and savings and loans groups – as well as trained faith leaders all continue to use their existing structures and skills to raise VAW/G awareness and reach new individual beyond the program's life. Processes and tools developed for the program, such as the Toolkit and FAMA cards, continue to be used by trained community members. Episcopal Relief & Development is currently working with the TWG to develop two new sets of activities to supplement the Toolkit, on trauma recovery and resilience and healthy family relationships, in response to unmet needs identified during implementation.

In the longer term, the TWG is developing institutional sustainability strategies, including transitioning into a formal structure as well as developing a resource mobilization strategy and capacity building plan for the IRCL. The TWG will also provide faith leader training in Bong and Grand Gedeh counties in 2018 and train other national faith bodies.

The intervention also demonstrated that peer-to-peer learning can be a successful strategy to transfer knowledge and skills while building training expertise and program ownership. Peer-to-peer learning was used by trained faith leaders and youth drama group members to broaden their reach. Replication of key program activities to 16 new districts will happen through peer-to-peer learning where current program participants will transfer knowledge and skills to new ones.

Further collaboration with government agencies can also ensure uptake of program efforts. The school National Teacher Code of Conduct work will be introduced to five new schools in each district and a formal presentation of the work will be made to the Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Education to explore how the model can be used by these agencies. Conversations with government partners include using county resources to maintain the safe houses initiated by the program.

The program also provides a tested model on engaging faith leaders on VAW/G prevention and response, and is currently being replicated in two other countries, Bong and Grand Gedeh where ECL-RD and Episcopal Relief & Development are implementing integrated development programs.



This case study describes the program “*Engaging Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Women and Girls in Liberia 2015-2017*”. The content of this study does not imply official endorsement by or reflect the official opinion of the United Nations, IRUSA, its Islamic Relief affiliates, or its donors.

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The Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief & Development is a non-governmental accredited, faith-based organization under the aegis of the Episcopal Diocese of Liberia, with oversight from its Health and Development Board. The ECL-RD existed long before the war in Liberia and was reactivated in 2007. The organization implements community-driven development programs in the areas of food security/agriculture, Savings with Education, health, Ebola recovery and gender-based violence. They work with community and diocesan volunteers, pastors, imams and faith-based institutions.

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