



Building Bridges of Faith Against Domestic Violence





Project d/d/d/ድልድል Annual Conference ‘Domestic Violence-Gender-Faith: Promoting integrated and decolonial approaches to domestic violence cross-culturally’: A Summary Report

A Project d/d/d/ድልድል and EMIRTA collaborative event

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 11-12 November 2022

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Table of Contents

Conference background and aims.....	6
Panels and key discussion points	9
Summary of group activity and roundtable discussion	26
Participants' responses and feedback	31
Preliminary outcomes and follow up action.....	35
Appendix: Links to conference recordings.....	37





Project Background

Project d/dl/ድልድል is dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive domestic violence alleviation systems in Ethiopia and the UK. The project is hosted at SOAS University of London, and is funded initially for four years by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the Future Leaders Fellowship “Bridging religious studies, gender & development and public health to address domestic violence: A novel approach for Ethiopia and the UK” (Grant Ref: MR/T043350/1; revised title), and supported with a research grant from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation awarded in 2019 under the proposal “Religion, conscience and abusive behaviour: Understanding the role of faith and spirituality in the deterrence of intimate partner violence in rural Ethiopia.”

The project seeks to promote a decolonial approach to addressing domestic violence by engaging substantively with the religio-cultural belief systems of domestic violence victims/survivors and perpetrators, and understanding how these interface with gender, material, and psychological parameters to facilitate or deter domestic violence. It aims to generate new research and intervention approaches working with Ethiopian collaborators, and rural and urban communities, and to apply knowledge from the respective countries in order to inform approaches for integrating and better supporting ethnic minority and migrant populations affected by domestic violence in the UK. The project employs research, sensitisation, knowledge exchange and public engagement activities, collaborating with partners, stakeholders, and communities in the three countries with the aims to:

- a) improve preparedness among clergy and seminarians to respond to victims/survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence in their communities.
- b) increase religio-cultural sensitivity in non-governmental and state-led domestic violence sectors in the project countries.
- c) develop integrated domestic violence support systems that can be sensitive and responsive to religio-culturally diverse populations; and
- d) promote reciprocal research partnerships and development for all team members, project partners and collaborators.

The project is informed by previous ethnographic investigations of conjugal abuse in the Ethiopian Orthodox community in northern Ethiopia. The research evidenced the importance of religious beliefs and experience in understanding the life of the laity, intersections with gender parameters and norms, and complex associations with the continuation and deterrence of conjugal abuse in this religious society. The study revealed important tensions between theological and folklore religious understandings, with ‘faith’ being juxtaposed in complex ways to ‘culture’ to preserve or discontinue pernicious behaviour and norms associated with conjugal abuse. The current report aims to disseminate key findings of project research and activity reports to a wider audience in an effort to improve understanding among clergy and religious stakeholders, state agents, and non-governmental domestic violence providers and practitioners about the complex role of religious beliefs and faith in experiences of domestic violence and abuse, and to promote cross-sectoral, faith-sensitive and integrated responses in Ethiopia, the UK and internationally.



Suggested citation

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Conference background and aims

In August 2020, Dr Romina Istratii, Honorary Research Associate to the Centre of World Christianity and the Department of Development Studies at SOAS University of London, was awarded a UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship (£1,287,659) to bring to fruition a challenging and novel project titled “Bridging religious studies, gender & development and public health to address domestic violence: A novel approach for Ethiopia and the UK” (revised title), now renamed Project d/dl/ድልድል. This was envisioned as a research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in East Africa and the UK.

The project works to generate new research and evidence around the ways in which religious beliefs, theology and the clergy can contribute to the deterrence of domestic violence, and to raise awareness about the religio-cultural parameters of domestic violence among practitioners within government and non-governmental sectors, with the overall objective of building better-integrated domestic violence support and referral systems in the project countries. At a more fundamental level, the project is keen to reverse the historical dominance of Northern societies in dictating domestic violence and gender-based violence theoretical understandings and practice internationally. The ultimate aim is to promote genuine knowledge sharing and learning between Ethiopia and the UK, and on a wider scale between the ‘Global South’ and the ‘Global North’, whereby evidence, lessons and good practices achieved in Ethiopia can inform ways to better integrate religious migrant and ethnic minority communities in the UK’s domestic violence support system.

The project was established on the basis of long-term working relationships with indigenous organisations in Ethiopia as a way of jointly implementing research and domestic violence interventions, ensuring that new evidence and approaches developed within the country inform the practices of Ethiopian organisations and benefit affected communities first, fostering sustainable impact over time. The project has numerous partners in Ethiopia and the UK, with the former including the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC) and the EMIRTA/አምርታ Research, Training and Development Institute in Ethiopia. New partnerships are currently being developed.

The first two years of the project culminated in the Project d/dl/ድልድል Annual Conference on 11-12 November 2022, which was delivered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia with the option for UK speakers and audiences to join online. The Annual Conference was co-organised with project partner EMIRTA Research, Training and Development Institute, who also collaborated with Dr Romina Istratii in conducting innovative research on domestic violence with the male population in the country.



The conference in Addis Ababa focused on the nexus ‘Domestic Violence – Gender – Faith’ and had three overall aims. The first aim was to promote a better integration of theological and religious perspectives in gender-sensitive work on domestic violence and abuse. While religious discourse is oftentimes appropriated, misused and can underpin the system that maintains the continuation of domestic violence and unhelpful help-seeking attitudes, it can also function as a coping mechanism, a healing tool and a mediation institution in religious contexts. The conference sought to explore this dual effect in a way that did not reduce ‘religion’ to either religious leaders or institutions, but approached religious worldviews holistically as an indivisible part of human identities and lived experiences.

The second aim was to facilitate a bridging of different theoretical frameworks and approaches to achieve a more integrated lens through which to appraise the issue of domestic violence and abuse and to identify appropriate responses by means of working collaboratively. Project d/dl/ደ/ልደ/ል understands that there is not a single aetiology or solution to domestic violence and abuse and that it is important to work with others to solve such an extensive and persisting societal problem. For example, a feminist understanding cannot ignore religious beliefs and the role of clergy since the former will often influence how people process traumatic events in their lives, how they explain abusiveness or how they mediate conflict. Conversely, a faith-informed approach cannot neglect a gender-sensitive understanding that acknowledges more profound societal or gender-related inequalities or the important contributions of women’s movements in responding to the problem. The project also recognises the need to integrate psychological parameters and the work of psychological counsellors for understanding the causes and effects of intimate partner abusiveness and how best to respond to victims, survivors and perpetrators.

The third aim of the conference was to contribute to a diversification of knowledge production in the area of domestic violence and abuse that can overcome the dominance of a single epistemological framework and achieve genuine knowledge sharing, but especially learning from the wider ‘Global South’ to the wider ‘Global North.’ This aim informed also the decision to hold the conference in Ethiopia, recognising in this way the many barriers that keep African researchers from participating in European and North American conferences. In the long-term, Project d/dl/ደ/ልደ/ል envisions the knowledge achieved in Ethiopia to inform also domestic violence responses in the UK, a society that is increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious and finds itself challenged to integrate this diversity in the provision of domestic violence services.

Informed by these aims, the organisers worked hard to bring together specialists from Ethiopia and the UK, as the main project countries, as well as other countries in East Africa, Asia and other parts of the world to promote genuine knowledge sharing and to lay the grounds for new collaborations. The conference activities combined presentations, panel discussions, workshops and group activities creatively to explore the intersection of domestic violence and abuse, gender inequalities and religious



beliefs and teachings from different theoretical and practical angles. A roundtable on the second day of the conference brought together feminist, religious and research organisations in the country and international specialists to explore a better integration pathway for religious, feminist and state resources to build effective referral systems and respond to domestic violence in Ethiopia. The conference programme also included a film screening that showcased effectively how spiritual, cultural and secular responses to mental health can combine to inform both attitudes and responses to mental health issues in a village community in Ghana.

The current report summarises the panel presentations and the roundtable discussion held during the two days of the conference. Emphasis is placed on the points and questions that attracted attention and deliberation among the participants and the recommendations that emerged for achieving a better collaboration across secular and religious stakeholders working to respond to domestic violence and abuse in Ethiopia and similar contexts in the world where faith is an important part of social life.

The report is organised as follows: the next section presents an overview of the conference structure and outlines some of the key points and questions that were raised during each panel discussion. A following section presents participants' views on barriers and opportunities for achieving integrated and faith-sensitive responses to domestic violence and abuse, followed by the key insights and recommendations that emerged during the roundtable discussion. The penultimate section presents feedback received by the participants on the conference topic and the knowledge sharing achieved in its context. The last section discusses some of the collaborations and project ideas that emerged from the conference and identifies follow-up steps that could inform high-level thinking and policy directions in the country and internationally.





Panels and key discussion points

Over 100 people attended the event physically and online over the two days of the conference, which was organised at Inter Luxury Hotel in Addis Ababa. About 80 physical participants attended in person, with many others from the UK, Ethiopia and other countries joining online. Among the physical presentations and keynote speeches, 14 were given by or included Ethiopian speakers who came from Gondar, Arba Minch, Meta and Addis Ababa. Thirteen presentations were given by international presenters from the UK, Egypt, Australia and other countries who submitted pre-recorded presentations. Additionally, five workshops were delivered by international specialists from the UK, US, Kenya, Pakistan and Italy, four of whom attended physically. Ethiopia-based attendees came from 10 universities, a government agency, an embassy, three religious institutions, 11 media outlets, and over a dozen NGOs. A list of all the organisations represented at the conference is included below:

Table 1: Organisations represented at the conference

Ethiopian organisations
Addis Ababa Bureau of Women, Children and Social Affairs
Addis Ababa Science and Technology University
Addis Ababa University (AAU)
Aksum University
Amhara Public Health Institute (APHI)
*AMNI
Arba Minch University
Armauer Hansen Research Institute
Bahir Dar University
Dilla University
*ECWC
EMIRTA Research, Training and Development Institute PLC
Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
Ethiopian Institute of Peace (EIP)
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOTC DICAC)
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (independent clergy)
Fnot Social and Psychological Counselling Charitable Organisation
Hawassa University
Kotebe University
Mahibere Kidusan
Mahibere Kidusan Research
*Me&huber
Setaweet
University of Gondar



Media

Aaketoba

Addis Admas

Addis Ayen

Addis Gize

Awash FM 90.7

Balageru TV

Global Online Addis Media

Harambe FM

Messun

She Take

Yegna TV

Other organisations in Ethiopia

British Embassy

FCDO UK

GIZ

Project d/dl/ድልድል

UK and international organisations

African Families Service (AFS), London Borough of Tower Hamlets, UK

Agora University

Anglican Communion, UK

Boston College

Brunel University London, UK

Faith & VAWG Coalition

FXB-Rwanda

Kenyatta University

Lancaster University, UK

Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE)

Middlesex University London, UK

SOAS University of London, UK

University and Doncaster & Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals (DBTH), UK

University of Bedfordshire, UK

University of Bristol, UK

University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

University of Rwanda

University of Toronto

World Vision Kenya

World Vision US

Participants did not provide the organisation's full name **For participants with multiple affiliations, only primary affiliation was included in this list. * This list does not reflect all the Ethiopian organisations who were invited but did not attend.*



Day 1 of the conference

Day 1 of Project dIdI/ድልድል Annual International Conference opened with an introduction by the project's Principal Investigator, Dr Romina Istratii, who addressed the room in both English and Amharic. Dr Istratii spoke about the background of the project and its emergence from long-term research in rural Ethiopia, whose findings had also informed the aims of the conference. She stressed the need to leverage on indigenous knowledge and institutions to respond to domestic violence and abuse in the country and to move towards a model of knowledge sharing between Ethiopia and the UK that is genuinely respectful and equitable. Mr Tesfaye Gonite, the CEO of EMIRTA, spoke next, sharing with the participants EMIRTA's vision to conduct rigorous and locally-grounded research that promotes indigenous knowledge, stressing in turn the need to respond to domestic violence and gender-based violence collaboratively in a time when the country is affected by conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).



Dr Romina Istratii delivering her opening remarks



Mr Tesfaye Gonite delivering his opening remarks

The opening remarks by the organisers were followed by two pre-recorded keynote speeches by an Ethiopia-based and a UK-based speaker. The first keynote speech was given by Mr Yilikal Shiferaw, the current Commissioner for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission (EOTC DICAC), a formal partner organisation to Project d/dl/ድልድል. In his speech, Mr Shiferaw referred to the work that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, often working with other religious stakeholders and leaders, has engaged in recent years to respond to domestic violence and abuse. Mr Shiferaw referred to the approach of EOTC DICAC in training clergy and other stakeholder groups on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), mentioning also the intervention that was designed by Dr Istratii and was implemented collaboratively by project d/dl/ድልድል and EOTC DICAC in the previous year. That project team trained 155 EOTC clergy in Amhara region by means of a compilation of relevant homilies spoken by St John Chrysostom (locally, Kidus Yohannes Afework) on the issue of marriage, the conjugal relationship and domestic violence.

The second keynote speech was given by Ms Mandy Marshall, Director for Gender Justice for the Anglican Communion in the UK and an active member of the project d/dl/ድልድል Advisory Board during the project's first two years of existence. In her speech, Ms Marshall spoke about the different forms of domestic violence and abuse affecting faith communities and religious individuals internationally, referencing studies that had found at times a higher frequency or likelihood of domestic abuse among religious individuals, thus stressing the urgency of religious institutions to respond. She shared insights



from her life-long experience working with churches to respond to domestic abuse and support victimised women (representing the predominant victimised gender group), drawing examples also from Australia and other contexts in the world to suggest what could be effective responses.

The first day's panel, which was led by Ethiopian researchers and specialists, explored the prevalence of domestic violence, risk factors and affected groups in Ethiopia. Presentations discussed first time intimate partner violence since marriage among ever-married Ethiopian women (Birye Dessalegn Mekonnen and Yibrie Azmeraw), trends, demands and challenges to protecting domestic workers in Ethiopia (Tirsit Sahledengil), prevalence of some forms of child abuse and associated risk factors in Oromia regional state (Abera Getachew), and factors contributing to the vulnerability of female domestic workers in Hosanna town (Lombebo Tagesse).

The second panel of the day explored survivor experiences of domestic violence, faith and implications for survivors internationally, with presentations covering the lived experiences of domestic abuse among Bangladeshi women in the UK (Aysha Ahmed), domestic violence and abuse in UK Muslim Communities (Rahmanara Chowdhury), honour-based violence in Halima Bashar's *Tears of the Desert and Fadumo Korn's Born in the Big Rains: A Memoir of Somalia and Survival* (Solomon Girma), suicide and domestic violence (Erminia Colucci), and service providers' perspectives supporting African Christian women with experience of IPV in England (Pamela Shelley).

A third panel, which was led by conference co-organiser EMIRTA, explored what could be social, cultural, linguistic and religious assets and values for promoting gender equality in Ethiopia. The panel covered presentations on the status of women in Ethiopian linguistics (Mulugeta Seyoum), current challenges and responses to GBV and reproductive health in Ethiopia (Tadesse A. Zerfu), socio-legal assets to address gender inequalities in the country (Rahel Kassa), and the role of indigenous women's customary institutions in fighting against GBV among Oromo communities specifically (Muluken Kassahun Amid).

Panel discussions in the room were dedicated to problematising definitions, types and risk factors of domestic abuse and violence in Ethiopia. Participants were generally conscious of conceptual limitations in how researchers defined domestic violence and abuse, including child abuse, in their respective research contexts and asked that researchers make transparent whether the working definitions they had used reflected their own or their research participants' understandings. Other participants challenged the researchers to reflect on how their findings and insights could inform practice and what these findings meant for their research communities and stakeholders. They challenged presenters to translate the research into societal relevance and policy implications.

Another set of discussions concerned the role and use of indigenous knowledge, cultural resources and institutions to respond to GBV in the country. Ethiopian and African participants questioned, inter alia, the relationship between culture and religion and problematised tensions between religious and



secular ideals, exploring whether and how it is possible to reconcile mainstream gender-sensitive concerns and priorities with lived experiences of health, body, femaleness and human agency in diverse rural communities of Ethiopia and other African countries.

The presentations were followed by a pre-recorded workshop delivered by Dr Lisa Fontes from the USA. In her presentation, Dr Fontes explored the tactics of coercive control including isolation, intimidation, monitoring, gaslighting, stalking and sexual and physical violence, and appropriate responses to it.

The first day of the conference ended with the screening of the film *Nkabom*, which explores mental health, spirituality and modern medicine in Ghana. The film was introduced by producer Dr Erminia Colucci, who attended the conference in person.



Some participants staying until late in the evening for the film screening



Day 2 of the conference

Day 2 opened with panels that examined theological, philosophical and feminist understandings of gender issues and GBV and tensions that might exist between these different belief and knowledge systems, as well as possible areas of convergence or collaboration. The first panel included an exploration of traditional *tafsīr* (interpretation) of Qur'ānic verses such as Q. 4:34 in Islamic traditions as a response to domestic violence and abuse in Muslim communities (Mahmood Ali Gomaa Afifi), a theology-informed critique to major feminist tenants by drawing from Christian Orthodox anthropology (Selam Reta), a philosophical appraisal on the nature of justice addressing intersectional discriminations in Ethiopia (Eyasu Barento), and the use of St John Chrysostom's homilies on marriage, conjugal cohabitation and domestic violence to build Ethiopian Orthodox clergy's preparedness to respond to domestic violence (Romina Istratii and Henok Hailu).



Ms Selam Reta delivering a presentation on Orthodox theology and feminism



Mr Henok Hailu presenting with Dr Istratii on a clergy training programme implemented in Ethiopia

Panel 5, in turn, explored the role of religious mediators in domestic violence experiences and responses and included presentations from UK-based and international presenters. The speakers covered domestic violence and religion in Black African families in Ghana and the UK (Amma Anane-Agyei), the role of traditional counsellors in GBV in Zambia (Benjamin Kalkum), and the EOTC DICAC approach to GBV prevention and response in Ethiopian communities (Bantamlak Gelaw).

The last panel of the day was dedicated to faith-based and culture-sensitive interventions to respond to domestic violence and other forms of GBV in international communities. It included presentations about the PURPOSE project that aims to enhance integration of faith-based and inclusive approaches into SGBV prevention, mitigation and response in COVID-19 emergency programming (Zayid Douglas, Jacqueline Ogega and Dolphine Kwamboka), approaches to engage faith in Higher Education to address GBV (Punita Lumb and Savroop Shergill) and about the Sugira Muryango intervention and research, a lay-workers-delivered father-engaged home-visiting intervention for families living in severe poverty with infants and children in Rwanda.



Questions and discussions during the panels focused on how best to leverage on religious knowledge and theology to respond to GBV and to change attitudes in communities, as well as the challenge of ensuring research impact and sustainability over time and after projects end. Numerous questions focused on the said tensions between feminist philosophical tenets and religious theological understandings of gender relations, problematising whether the end goal of feminist activism could align with a religious perspective on gender relations and how the latter might be employed more effectively with religious communities.

After the panels, participants were invited to participate in a short group activity facilitated by Dr Istratii, which invited the attendees to reflect and discuss questions around achieving integrated and faith-sensitive responses to domestic violence and abuse.



Participants during the group discussion exercise

The panels were followed by four workshops delivered by Dr Erminia Colucci, Dr Grace Okongo, Professor Gene Feder and Professor Parveen Ali, which covered the use of visual methods in sensitive



research, action-research involving communities to respond to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and other gender-related issues, and approaches and methodologies to design and evaluate domestic violence programmes according to programme needs and context, respectively.



Professor Parveen Ali delivering a workshop



Dr Erminia Colucci delivering a workshop





Dr Grace Okongo and Professor Gene Feder sharing a table at the conference





Day 2 concluded with a roundtable on how to leverage on the opportunities that theological teachings on gender relations offer in each context, acknowledging the problematic deployment of religious teachings in communities and the existing gaps in theological knowledge among religious teachers, power hierarchies between clergy and laities and domestic violence survivors, and many more issues that overall nuanced the conversation on domestic violence responses in the country and internationally. The roundtable discussions are summarised in detail in the following section.



Participants during the roundtable discussion



Throughout the two days of the conference, participants were provided with numerous refreshment breaks to network and to continue conversations started inside the conference room.









The day concluded with a group photo with the organisers and speakers, which included also many participants.





Summary of group activity and roundtable discussion

Day 2 offered the opportunity to explore together with the participants barriers and opportunities for achieving integrated and faith-sensitive responses to domestic violence and abuse in the country and internationally. This group activity was facilitated by Dr Istratii who organised the participants in two groups, asking them to reflect on the barriers and opportunities respectively. The participants were invited to write their answers and thoughts on post-it notes and place them on a wall for collective reflection during refreshment breaks. The outcome of the exercise is shown below and answers are grouped according to the question in a table that follows.



Participants' responses from the group exercise



Table 2: Participants' responses organised according to question

Question 1: What does an integrated approach look like?	Question 2: What are the barriers to achieving an integrated approach?
<p><u>System/Approach</u> Multi-sectoral approach Mapping each actor's role and capacity as first stage Invest in people not structures Bringing together like-minded people A bridge, like project d/dl, that bridges and connects the multiple stakeholders Using an organised approach (problem should be defined first, who implements, organise, programme leadership should be centred) Centralised structure but decentralised approach Allow all actors to take a step (when needed) and contribute Theory in practice Community Engagement</p> <p><u>Faith-sensitive</u> Promotes religious teaching</p> <p><u>Policy</u> Dialogue among elites (political, religious, other) Government policies / strategies</p> <p><u>Networks integration</u> Information of platforms Networking</p> <p><u>Knowledge mobilisation</u> Awareness-raising Nurturing local culture against GBV Using model women (heroines) Using international platforms for women</p>	<p><u>System/Approach</u> Lack of integration / lack of collaboration among stakeholders / lack of joint approach</p> <p><u>Cultural competence and public engagement</u> Lack of domestic violence advocacy work Lack of expertise Lack of cultural competence Lack of involvement of community</p> <p><u>Finance</u> Absence of funding</p> <p><u>Conceptual</u> Differences in understandings of the concept</p> <p><u>Media</u> Lack of media training Absence of and access to media</p> <p><u>Attitudinal</u> Reactive not proactive Sticking to comfort zone</p> <p><u>Culture</u> Accepting domestic violence and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as a sign of love expression Not being able to see it as a problem Considering domestic violence as normal Domestic violence being under-reported Lack of awareness by the victims</p>



Capacity-building & training

Sustain development of case reporting
Referral linkages
Identification of cases

The roundtable discussion was opened with some reflective thoughts by Ms Elisabeth Gezahegn King, an Ethiopia-born woman working as membership coordinator of the Faith & VAWG Coalition in the UK. Elsa reflected on how a more organised response could be achieved in Ethiopia that builds on the strengths of a secular referral system as found in the UK, but also acknowledges its limitations and leverages more integrally on communities' religious and cultural institutions and resources to respond to the problem. In comparing her experience in the UK and Ethiopia, Elsa noted that in the UK, faith was historically marginalised in the mainstream response, which has made the voices of community-based activists and voices necessary to integrate. On the other hand, in Ethiopia, much community-related work has involved religious leaders due to the prominent role that religious institutions and faith have always had in the country.

Others noted that it might be appropriate to take a faith-specific approach to ensure that the responses designed and implemented make sense to communities of different religious traditions and affiliations. One participant noted that within Christian communities, women and survivors could be best reached inside the churches through the mediation of the clergy, but explained that this might not be the best tactic in Muslim communities because in traditional societies women do not generally go to the mosque as this is primarily a space reserved for males. Thus, they noted, working in religious spaces might not necessarily translate in the same effects for all religious communities. The implication was that it would be important to think how not to discriminate when a universal, high-level or multi-faith approach is employed across the entire country/population. A one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective, requiring more contextual approaches.

Another part of the discussion focused on the preparedness of religious leaders, religious teachers and marital advisors to respond to domestic violence and abuse in their communities. It was agreed that religious leaders and preachers generally have power and influence in the community, but they are not always fully or sufficiently trained to speak on gender matters or domestic violence and abuse. Religious scholars are also influential, but they may have gaps in their knowledge on marriage theology or may not be motivated to keep learning. Within the Ethiopian context, participants stressed that it would be important to foster among religious people the ability to say 'I don't know' so that they approach difficult issues with care and thoughtfulness not to misguide under the felt pressure of appearing to have all the answers. Some participants spoke of the need to foster accountability among priests and religious teachers. In fact, a suggestion was made that it would be helpful to ensure that



the clergy are being regularly evaluated for their knowledge and performance to ensure that any gaps are addressed when and as needed.

In raising these different points, participants emphasised the need to differentiate between what the community understands as its religious practices and the theological teachings. Much discussion focused on the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido tradition and faith due to its historical influence in Ethiopia and the existence of a large number of adherents in the country. Both theology scholars and clergy agreed that there is nothing explicit in the teachings of the Church that is supporting domestic violence or abuse, however, often believers will interpret their cultural norms and practices as religious and will receive the religious teachings through the lens of cultural practice. Similarly, some participants stressed that the clergy are not the source of evil in Ethiopia. They generally try to, and do, teach the teachings of the Church, which are overall positive and advocate for peaceful relations between all individuals. However, as Dr Istratii's previous anthropological research had revealed, priests and spiritual fathers often do not realise how their discourses are received by the communities, who may see their 'culture' as 'religious' and may have difficulty differentiating between the normative practice they are familiar with and the nominal teachings of the faith tradition that they follow.

Participants also stressed that the Church structure trickles down all the way to the family institution, with the spiritual father/father confessor being part of the life of the married couple and family and advising on all life matters and events. They reasoned that this mechanism could easily be leveraged to respond to domestic violence. In addition to working through the community-based structures that religious institutions already have in place, participants noted the need for leadership and commitment at a higher decision-making level. High-level dialogue with multiple faith leaders would be needed. Bishops and Imams must bring attention and reinforce an anti-GBV discourse at the level of public discourse, complementing initiatives that have already been made in the country, such as issuing declarations condemning GBV. Participants agreed that talking about domestic violence and abuse openly would need to become normalised within religious communities and every echelon within religious institutions and organisations should be mobilised for awareness-raising. In the end, there should be zero tolerance for domestic violence and other forms of GBV in the Church and the faith community more generally for faith-informed responses to work in the country.

Others stressed the need for more research and work on masculinities to be conducted in order to challenge popular understandings of what a religious husband/man means in the community. The church, mosque or other religious institution could play an important role in creating positive male role models and reaching out to men. One participant noted that churches can be less judgemental towards the traditional male model (than, for example, feminist critiques), which could more easily convince men of traditional sensibilities to revisit their perceptions and behaviours. In other words, religious institutions are in a good position to create positive visions of what it means to be a man as



they can leverage on theological language and examples from religious texts and experiences to convey more positive male behaviour without alienating these men in the process.

Participants agreed that the ideal domestic violence intervention in Ethiopia would be a faith-sensitive approach engaging all the relevant stakeholders, including men, women, clergy and health professionals who can screen for domestic violence/GBV victims and survivors. In designing such interventions, implementation actors would need to consider the current system in place and map the actors at administration and community level responding to the problem and their good practices, and identify how these could be integrated better in a coordinated response system. Some participants proposed that this integration and collaboration across sectors and stakeholder groups could be aided by having a common definition of domestic violence and abuse, without losing sight of the importance of context and individual differences. Others proposed that in some contexts it might be necessary to use a more neutral term that does not alienate people and that the clergy may more easily understand and relate to, such as talking about 'family violence.'

The role of researchers and data generation was also emphasised in this process as researchers can produce evidence to inform responses and policies. Moreover, it was suggested that more data on domestic violence and abuse are currently needed and that these must be made available to the public and relevant stakeholders so that the latter are educated on these matters and can be more easily mobilised.

Integrating survivor perspectives better was also discussed, which were generally found to be missing in discussions around domestic violence/GBV in Ethiopia. One participant suggested collecting and making available stories of women helping other women to counteract more stereotypical perceptions that women are always hostile or competitive to other women, and to mobilise a women's coordinated response to domestic violence/GBV.

In conclusion, reflecting also the responses given during the group activity, the participants spoke about the need to look at the bigger picture to identify how different actors that are part of the current system can work better together. Participants' comments pointed to the need for a multi-pronged comprehensive response that does not leave any stakeholder ignored or marginalised. This creates the urgency to consider carefully what co-production model to put in place and how to evaluate such a response in the country, how this could be coordinated while operating as a decentralised structure, and how processes of co-production could be governed so that the division of labour is clear and resonates with all sides and stakeholder groups.



Participants' responses and feedback

Participant's feedback on the conference was shared through social media, directly with the organisers, on the project's LinkedIn page and through evaluation surveys that were circulated after the event.

In general, participants felt that the conference was timely and topical and brought attention to an urgent issue and the role of religious institutions and faith in domestic violence prevention and response mechanisms. Participants also appreciated the diversity of actors attending the conference, representing different faith groups and traditions, agencies and organisations and disciplines. This was found helpful for promoting cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary responses, as had been envisioned by the conference. Lastly, the fact that the conference was held in Ethiopia and focused on promoting Ethiopian research and perspectives was considered a unique characteristic of the conference and was highly appreciated.

During and after the conference, numerous participants shared with the organisers how much they appreciated the variety of topics addressed and the diverse participation achieved in the conference. Two participants, a speaker and a member of the audience respectively, wrote directly on Dr Istratii's public LinkedIn profile with the following comments:

Dear Dr. Romina, this event was truly [an] inspiring, informative and integrative experience for me, thanks for the opportunity and time. Congratulations on your success. (Selam Reta)

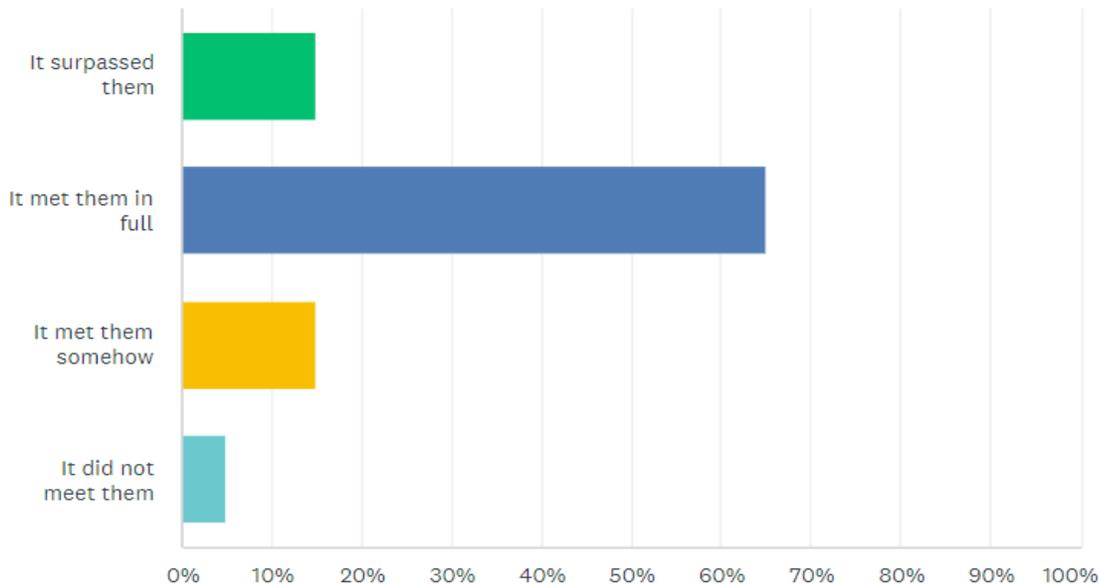
It was an amazing platform that genuinely walked the talk of using indigenous knowledge in an approach to global health. (Bersabeh Mekasha Kassaye)

Additionally, the day after the conference a survey was set up and emailed to the organisers, speakers and participants. The survey takers were given the option to submit the survey anonymously or to identify themselves by name.

In total, 20 respondents took the survey, among whom 65% affiliated with a University or Research-intensive Institution, 10% with a Feminist or Women's organisation, 5% with a Religious Institution, 10% with Government and 10% with 'Other.' Hence, the responses discussed here are skewed in the sense that they reflect primarily the opinions and feedback of those associated with the research and university sector. Moreover, the majority of those who took the survey were either physical speakers (50%) or physical participants (45%).



To the question ‘How well did the conference meet your expectations?’, the majority of the survey takers (13/20) reported being very content (see the figure below).



Survey takers' responses

The survey also asked participants if the conference experience would inform their practice in the future and to reflect in which ways specifically. Invariably (20/20) replied positively. Several respondents mentioned having gained insight into new concepts, approaches, or methodologies, such as in the case of a respondent affiliated with a feminist or women’s organisation who stated that they gained “new ways of using evidence (i.e. arts-based research) and [...] new concepts (i.e. coercive control).” Other survey takers shared comments such as the below:

I got best experiences (sic) during the conference mainly on how to develop intervention, whom to include, and what to consider in [the] prevention of gender-based violence. (Birye Dessalegn Mekonnen, presenter affiliated with University or Research Institute)

I have always understood how faith is an important component in [the] day to day lives of Ethiopians but had the understanding that public health practices need to be completely secular in practice. From this conference I have learnt some ways to incorporate faith based approaches in research and project works. (Anonymous, participant affiliated with University or Research Institute)



The diversity in topics, methods and representation in the conference was mentioned several times. Additionally, the inclusion of a religious perspective as well as a decolonial perspective were notably appreciated. Other participants highlighted the good network opportunities that the conference offered them. Additional first-person account testimonies are presented in the table below.

Table 4: Other direct testimonies submitted through the survey

<p><i>Firstly, I really appreciate who organised this conference. The conference was very interesting especially for sharing experience from different expertise and stakeholders. This conference [was] also helpful in respect to updating our knowledge from different presented paper[s]. I hope [that in] the future you may add more local and international research findings.</i></p> <p>Meka Kedir Jibril, participant affiliated with University or Research Institute</p>	<p><i>It was lovely to participate and present in your beautiful conference. The objectives of the conference were really interesting to me, especially the concept of Gender based violence, as it is my area of research interest. [...] This made me fully understand, [it] touched [me], and [made me] being (sic) happy with the messages shared during the conference. I wish to contribute mine to your project.</i></p> <p>Birye Dessalegn Mekonnen, presenter from University or Research Institute</p>
<p><i>As Program Manager of peacebuilding , my organisation [is] now considering integrating mental health and psycho-social support in our projects in partnership with pertinent state and non-state actors. To that end, I found some of the topics presented during the conference very relevant. Moreover, I learned [about] the methodologies such as film data and visual methods for activist research (by Dr. Erminia). Presentations related to [the] role of religious institutions to respond to domestic violence, and Integration of Indigenous Women’s Customary Institutions Communities, Ethiopia are among others very interesting. [...] Overall, the conference went very well. [...]</i></p> <p>Anonymous, participant affiliated with Ethiopian NGO</p>	<p><i>It was really an outstanding experience I had. It gave me a look into different angles and perspectives. I met people all over the world with different academic background thanks to EMIRTA as well d/dl.</i></p> <p>Natnat Tsegays, participant affiliated with Feminist or Women’s Organisation</p> <p><i>Very inclusively organised, and caringly delivered with a good balance of listening versus participation; and a wide range of speakers from very diverse backgrounds and discussing diverse approaches.</i></p> <p>Anonymous, participant affiliated with Government</p>

Apart from some technical challenges faced on the day to connect to audiences online, some participants noted gaps in representation. While the attendance achieved at the conference was highly appreciated for its diversity and international character, some participants noticed that key religious parties and women’s organisations were missed. One participant also wished that more





practitioners from NGOs would have been there, noting that most of the participants were from academia:

[I]t could have been good balancing practitioners with researchers and scholars. Local NGOs like Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, Coalition of Ethiopian Women for Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs could share lessons while also learning from the conference. (Anonymous, participant affiliated with Ethiopian NGO).

What this participant could not know is that all the named organisations, as well as specific individuals, had been invited, but did not attend. It needs to be emphasised that organisations, but especially those operating in the NGO sector in Ethiopia, are juggling multiple projects simultaneously and have limited capacity to attend conferences as a result of conflicting priorities. One of the aims of writing this report was to provide an accessible summary that will be made available also to organisations that were not in attendance.



Preliminary outcomes and follow up action

The conference was jointly organised by Project dIdI/ድልድል and EMIRTA Research, Training and Development Institute to capture a wider range of perspectives and to facilitate cross-cultural knowledge sharing, but most importantly to evidence that collaborative initiatives are necessary for creative impact and long-term effects. The bridging of disciplines, sectors and geographies that was achieved through the collaborative conference laid the ground for more cross-cultural, cross-sectoral and cross-country work to be conceptualised and implemented in the future.

For example, during a workshop on designing and evaluating domestic violence programmes and interventions, one of the presenters from the UK promised to support and join a team planning to evaluate a community action-based FGM programme in Kenya, thus foreshadowing new cross-cultural and cross-institutional collaborations. Other collaborations were in the making during the two days, such as between a member of the EOTC clergy who had been involved in the development of the *Development Bible* in Ethiopia, the Faith and VAWG Coalition in Ethiopia and Dr Istratii, exploring the possibility of merging clergy training materials to respond to domestic violence in the migrant Ethiopian Orthodox community in the UK.

Others expressed new project ideas and explored new cross-sectoral, faith-secular collaborations that they previously had not considered. For example, the director of a feminist organisation in Ethiopia expressed the desire to work with clergy and theologically equipped trainers to respond to child abuse in religious communities. An international organisation with offices in Ethiopia, in turn, approached Dr Istratii to facilitate and mediate communication with EOTC DICAC as a way of achieving a better integration of local religious institutions in international development responses.

These are only a few of the ideas and collaborations sparked by the conference presentations and discussions that were brought to the attention of the organisers, but it is understood that many more conversations were begun during the two days of the conference, networking activities and group exercises. These could lay the groundwork for sharing evidence, experience and knowledge across sectors and actors working to respond to GBV and domestic violence and abuse in the country.

To ensure that the insights of the conference will reach a wider circle of relevant stakeholders, project dIdI/ድልድል and EMIRTA have discussed the option of producing a short policy brief, initially in Amharic, that would summarise some of the key messages of the conference to be disseminated widely. In the future, this policy brief could be shared in face-to-face focus group discussions or workshops with different stakeholders groups, including government agencies, NGOs, religious institutions, women's organisations and others. Moreover, this report will be followed by an open access publication of



Conference Proceedings that will aim to publish the full papers of those presenters who would like to share their work with a wider audience.

In addition to these steps, the organisers will continue to reflect on the experience and outcomes of the conference to identify new opportunities for sharing its insights and key messages with a wider public. We welcome suggestions and ideas on how to maximise the impact of the conference and we invite participants, audiences and others who are interested in our work to communicate with Dr Istratii (ri5@soas.ac.uk) and EMIRTA (emirta.moa@gmail.com) directly to share and to explore new ideas and collaborations together.



Appendix: Links to conference recordings

Day 1

[Welcome from the organisers: Project d/d/ድልድል and EMIRTA](#)

[Welcome from Keynote Speaker Mr Ato Yilikal, Commissioner at the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission \(EOC DICAC\)](#)

[Welcome from Keynote Speaker, Ms Mandy Marshall, Director for Gender Justice for the Anglican Communion, UK](#)

PANEL 1: PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, RISK FACTORS AND AFFECTED GROUPS IN ETHIOPIA

[Watch presentations by Birye Dessalegn Mekonnen & Yibrie Azmeraw, Tirsit Sahledengil, Abera Getachew and Lombebo Tagesse.](#)

PANEL 2: SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, FAITH AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SURVIVOR SUPPORT SERVICES INTERNATIONALLY

[Watch presentations by Solomon Girma and Erminia Colucci](#)

[Watch presentation by Aysha Ahmed \(pre-recorded\)](#)

[Watch presentation by Rahmanara Chowdhury \(pre-recorded\)](#)

Watch presentation by Pamela Shelley (to be added)

PANEL 3: INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSES TO GENDER INEQUALITY AND GBV

[Watch presentations by Mulugeta Seyoum, Tadesse A. Zerfu, Rahel Kassa and Muluken Kassahun Amid](#)

[Workshop 1: Invisible Chains: From Domestic Violence to Coercive Control, Lisa Fontes \(pre-recorded\)](#)

[Workshop 2: Visual Methods for Activist Research, Erminia Colucci](#)



Day 2

PANEL 4: THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER INJUSTICES IN FAITH COMMUNITIES

[Watch presentations by Selam Reta, Eyasu Barento and Romina Istratii & Henok Hailu](#)

[Watch presentation by Mahmoud Ali Gomaa Afifi \(pre-recorded\)](#)

PANEL 5: THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS MEDIATORS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES AND RESPONSES

[Watch presentations by Benjamin Kalkum and Bantamlak Gelaw](#)

[Watch presentation by Amma Anane-Agyei \(pre-recorded\)](#)

PANEL 6: FAITH-BASED AND CULTURE-SENSITIVE INTERVENTIONS TO RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND OTHER FORMS OF GBV/VAWG IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

[Watch presentation by Zayid Douglas, Jacqueline Ogega and Dolphine Kwamboka \(pre-recorded\)](#)

[Watch presentation by Punita Lumb and Savroop Shergill \(pre-recorded\)](#)

[Watch presentation by Jess Littman, Gabi Phend, Stephanie Bazubagira Magali, Sarah K.G. Jensen, Vincent Sezibera, and Theresa S. Betancourt \(pre-recorded\)](#)

[Watch presentation by Grace Bonareri Mose](#)

[Workshop 3: Evaluating domestic abuse programmes: choosing a research design, Gene Feder](#)

[Workshop 4: Incorporating evaluation when designing effective domestic violence prevention programmes, Parveen Ali](#)

[Roundtable Discussion \(Full\)](#)

