



Faith-sensitive Approaches to Gender Equality and Empowerment

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Content

4

Enabling Local Religious Actors to Eliminate Violence Against Women



6

Girls' Holistic Education Program in Faisalabad, Pakistan



8

Every Girl Matters: Reducing the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya



10

Engaging Men in Six African Countries to Advocate for Gender Equality and Justice for Widows

12

Transforming Faith Leaders' Attitudes About Child Marriage and Gender Equality in Senegal

14

Burundi Breaks Silence: Increasing Engagement of Minority Groups in Burundi



16

She for Dialogue: Women's Empowerment in the Field of Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding in the Arab Region

18

Using Freedom of Religion or Belief as a Tool to Strengthen Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

20

Reflections on Intersectionality in the Documentation of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in North Korea

22

Masrtoptia – the Dream of Equality in Egypt



24

Upholding Rights of Women Survivors in Sinjar, Iraq

26

Reform at the Kadhis Court in Kenya to Provide Access to Justice for Women and Girls

Introduction

Religion plays an important role in shaping people's perspectives, values, and attitudes in life. Religious actors occupy a unique position when it comes to transformational behavioral processes at the individual and collective level. This is true, too, for sustained progress towards gender equality and empowerment. Also in interfaith work, it becomes clear that societal and cultural norms, including those framed by religion, can either support or prevent the unbiased application of and access to basic human rights, including decisions on bodily autonomy¹. One tool for addressing gender inequality is conducting spiritually- and culturally-informed dialogue at the local level about how to (re)assess certain established practices without disparaging a culture or religion as a whole and without challenging core values of the people involved.

This booklet shares faith-sensitive good practices that help break down barriers at the intersection of religion and gender equality. It highlights contributions of members of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) to gender empowerment. PaRD convenes governments, multilateral entities, academia, religious and other civil society actors on a long-term basis to amplify contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and make them visible at a global level. PaRD facilitates Workstreams and Taskforces, and offers a safe space that provides continuity for global dialogue, learning, sharing of good practices and evidence, and collaboration to better inform policy and practices through recommendations and practitioners' guidelines.

Twelve thought-provoking stories reflecting experiences from different contexts and faith traditions showcase efforts of international and faith-based organizations in

fostering peace and promoting gender equality in line with SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. These inspiring and encouraging stories are clear indicators that it is a joint responsibility to empower not only women but also men of faith in taking bold new actions to enable sustainable and inclusive solutions, and create a more just and peaceful world. They bear witness to the importance of feminist policies which emphasize inclusivity and the need to pay more attention to the most vulnerable and marginalized people in the world.

PaRD has a dedicated Workstream on Gender Equality and Empowerment, specifically addressing SDG 5. This Workstream comprises members from international and faith-based organizations, multilateral institutions, academia, and governments. Its workplan is guided by international normative frameworks, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Declaration.

The Workstream pays particular attention to increasing understanding about the role of religious actors and the transformative power of religion and religious women. It strives to enhance religious literacy² within the international community and across religious communities and organizations. By bringing together diverse perspectives on religious engagement, the Workstream addresses a range of global issues, including poverty, education on gender sensitive programming and sexual and gender-based violence. It aims to exchange knowledge and good practices among actors, build capacities and support advocacy work through joint, long-term collaboration.



- 1 United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), (2021). Report: My body is my own: Claiming the right to autonomy and self-determination., Available at: UNFPA ESARO | My Body Is My Own
- 2 Religious literacy: understanding basics of the cultural, historical, political, and social context in which a particular religious tradition exists, and how and when to engage with religious actors, including the ethical, legal, and strategic constraints on religious engagement

Enabling Local Religious Actors to Eliminate Violence Against Women

Background

Religious actors wield significant influence, especially in specific regions, as catalysts for change on a global scale. Recognizing these players' pivotal role in combatting gender-based violence, CKU, the Center for Church-Based Development, and Danner, a Danish feminist organization dedicated to eliminating gender-based violence, collaborated on the development of a new online course.

Annika Bach, coordinator at CKU, highlights the importance of comprehending the intricate intersection between religion and culture, and understanding how patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings can be exploited to validate acts of violence against women. To achieve success in this mission, it is imperative to work in partnership with local religious leaders, as they possess the capacity to challenge and reshape these narratives.

Activities & Outputs

Developed in collaboration with Danner and Dr. Elisabet le Roux from Stellenbosch University in South Africa, CKU designed its online on-demand course specifically to address the issue of violence against women by offering concrete tools that are relevant to individuals working towards poverty alleviation and the promotion of human rights. Throughout the course, participants explore real-life cases that highlight the transformative impact of involving religious actors. Available in English, this free course is accessible through the following link:
<https://cku.dk/en/knowledge-center/all-resources/>

Outcomes

The primary objective of the course is to provide a learning space for those who want to contribute to creating a world where women in the Global South can live free of violence. To achieve this goal, participants gain a comprehensive understanding of violence, including its different forms and how it specifically affects women and children. Participants acquire knowledge about current legislation and the rights of women who are victims of violence, empowering them to advocate for and protect individuals within their local communities who experience violence. They learn how to access referral systems that provide victims of violence with crucial resources and support.

Course participants further develop practical skills such as active listening, externalizing language, and the narrative method, which has proven an effective means of engaging with and supporting victims of violence on their path to healing and empowerment. Participants learn to evaluate the varying influence of religion on violence against women. They gain a deeper understanding of how religious actors can serve as catalysts for change, utilizing platforms such as preaching, soul care, and village meetings to raise awareness and initiate collective action against violence. Finally, participants learn about the significance of establishing strategic collaborations with religious actors, incorporating their perspectives and expertise into project activities to maximize impact and effectively combat violence against women.



Contributing organization

Center for Church Based Development

Further information

<https://cku.dk/en>



Shadows of violence can be challenged when communities come together to address gender-based violence, empowering women to step out of the darkness.

Credits: Berit Kessler/AdobeStock

The project successfully enhances the understanding of practitioners in the Global South and international program staff regarding violence against women, enabling them to further contemplate and apply their learnings in their respective roles and organizations.

By equipping participants with the necessary tools and resources, they are empowered to provide effective assistance to survivors, ensuring they receive the support they need within the legal framework.

“ Patriarchal religious interpretations can be used to legitimize violence against women in local communities. If we are to succeed in eliminating violence, it becomes important to work with and through local religious actors, as they are the ones who can counter and change these narratives and thus change attitudes and actions locally.

Annika Bach, CKU,
Center for Church Based Development

The project has increased participants' insight into the complex relationship between religion and violence against women and offers guidance on how to effectively engage and collaborate with religious actors in the fight against violence.

Overall, the project has successfully achieved its intended learning outcomes, leaving participants better equipped to address violence against women, support survivors through the legal system, and engage with religious actors to combat violence and promote a life free from violence for women in the Global South.

What was achieved

The project enhanced practitioners' understanding of violence against women and enabled them to apply their learnings in their organizations and offer effective assistance to survivors.

Girls' Holistic Education Program in Faisalabad, Pakistan

Background

Gender-based violence against women is deeply rooted in the patriarchal interpretations of religion in Pakistan. According to literature from the United Nations, 32 percent of women in Pakistan have experienced physical violence and 40 percent of married women have suffered from spousal abuse.

Members of non-Muslim minorities are in particular danger, as they often lack access to education and opportunities to participate in social and economic life. Young Christian women often work as housemaids to earn money to support their families. In these contexts, they often become victims of sexual harassment or even end up in a forced marriage. Human rights organizations in Pakistan and abroad estimate that around 1,000 Hindu, Christian, and Ahmadiyya Muslim girls and women are abducted, sexually abused, and forcibly married every year.

Activities & Outputs

A six-month training program by the local Caritas in Faisalabad has responded to this situation by offering a holistic education program that provides marginalized Christian girls and women with vocational counseling measures and the opportunity to complete internships in Catholic institutions and commissions. In addition, trainings on self-determination and personality development as well as leadership seminars are conducted.



Contributing organization

missio - Internationales Katholisches Missionswerk e.V.

Further information

<https://www.missio-hilft.de/>

Outcomes

Through the project's implementation, the capacity of young rural girls was significantly enhanced. They received comprehensive education and training that equipped them with the knowledge and skills necessary to safeguard themselves against various forms of discriminatory violence.

By engaging with these girls and their families, the project encouraged active participation in religious activities, fostering a deeper connection with their faith and community. This resulted in increased faith and commitment among young Christian girls, inspiring them to play more active roles within the church.

By providing spiritual education and support, the project helped foster resilience and a sense of identity within the Christian community. Young Christian girls in these communities benefited from these religious learnings, experiencing positive mental growth and increased confidence.

Through the project's interventions, these girls learned about their equal rights and opportunities to participate in social, religious, and public activities. This newfound empowerment allowed them to live their lives more freely, with a sense of confidence and awareness of their rights.

By actively involving like-minded young leaders in church activities, the project created a platform for their participation which increased engagement and fostered a sense of ownership and commitment among young Christians.

In the first project period between September 2021 and March 2022, more than 4,500 girls were able to benefit from the various offers within the framework of the education program.



Young girls and women take part in education and training to foster resilience and increase their self-confidence, so they can better safeguard themselves from discriminatory violence.

Credits: Caritas Pakistan Faisalabad

“ The project has encouraged me to work hard so that our community can have a better future.

Nisha Aslam, 20 years old

One of the girls that benefitted from the project is Nisha Aslam, a resident of Bonnie Abad, a village in rural Pakistan. As Nisha’s family struggles financially, she works to help support them. However, she faces constant fear and discrimination due to her minority Christian status. Her parents have advised her to remain silent about religious differences to avoid further discrimination.

After Nisha secured a job at a factory, her anxieties increased. As a Christian, she felt unsupported and vulnerable, believing that speaking up for her rights could put her in danger. Seeking solace, she confided in a friend who introduced her to a Bible study group organized by Caritas Pakistan Faisalabad.

Through the Bible study group, Nisha’s faith is strengthened, and she has gained a better understanding of her responsibilities and rights. Caritas empowers Nisha and others like her to stand up to discrimination, forced conversion, harassment, and violence. Nisha, now 20 years old, feels encouraged to work hard for a better future for her community, convinced that God is always with them, providing strength, guidance, and protection.

What was achieved

Young girls from religious minorities in Pakistan work for a better future for their communities and are better able to recognize their rights and take a stand against discrimination, forced conversion, harassment, and violence.

Every Girl Matters: Reducing the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya

Background

Though Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was declared illegal in Kenya in 2011, the practice remains common. For this reason, Pingstmissionens Utvecklingsamarbete's (Pentecostal Mission's Development Cooperation, PMU) partner organization, the Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) is working with the Maasai community in Olgulului in Southern Kenya to end the widespread harmful custom. Since FPFK commenced their work in 2017, several villages recorded a tremendous drop in FGM, yet more work still needs to be done to end the practice.

Activities & Outputs

FPFK is actively engaged with teachers and children as well as with Morans (young Maasai warriors) and female circumcisers, as they play a key role in preventing FGM. Head teachers have become champions of social change, influencing parents and other community groups to abandon harmful practices. Schools have also taken on an active role in rescue initiatives, offering referrals and support to rescued children.

Notably, FGM is viewed as a rite of passage and preparation for life as an adult woman. Girls who have not been exposed to FGM are strongly stigmatized. Hence, an essential part of the project has been to arrange a child rights celebration as an alternative. FPFK organized 3- to 4-day trainings for girls, where they discussed topics such as early marriage, FGM, and early pregnancy.

On the last day of this workshop, there is a celebration where it is also emphasized that girls have the right to remain children.

FPFK also collaborates with Morans, who in the Maasai culture hold significant roles as young warriors. The group is educated about the dangers of FGM and ways to have safe sex to prevent early pregnancy.

Outcomes

The project has resulted in increased self-esteem and confidence among pupils and led to a significant reduction in the prevalence of FGM, as well as a decline in school dropouts, child pregnancies, and early marriages.

The project has likewise empowered boys to become allies in the fight against FGM, to show understanding and support during girls' menstruation, promoting gender equality. Additionally, the project has successfully involved fathers in their daughters' lives, leading to increased support, protection, and active engagement.

The project has also successfully mobilized churches to play a crucial role as places of refuge for FGM victims and centers for mentorship. They hold all community groups accountable for their commitment to ending FGM, spreading awareness, and supporting female circumcisers in abandoning the practice. Chiefs and other local leaders have also shown increased commitment to ending FGM by actively engaging in discussions and trainings facilitated by the project and becoming advocates for change within their communities.

Since FPFK commenced their work in 2017, some villages recorded up to 50 % drop in FGM, and the project has reached almost 900 girls and 1500 women. The key to success comes from FPFK being trusted as the local church that people in the area are familiar with and know.



Contributing organization

PMU, a member of the EU-CORD network



The tools used in the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Procedure.

Credits: PMU/Matilda Nyami

FGM is a prerequisite for girls to undergo child marriages. Advocacy against FGM therefore protects girls from a form of gender-based violence that denies them their rights to freedom from torture* — as child marriage is designated as. The link between FGM and child marriage is illustrated by an example from one of the girls who benefited from the project. The 15-year-old, who had never attended school and was expected to perform domestic chores, learned about the project's presence in a neighboring village. She mustered the courage to attend a meeting celebrating the Day of the Girl Child. Recognizing her dire situation, the project team welcomed her, intervened to prevent her forced marriage, and enrolled her in boarding school.

Maambo successfully passed her exams and progressed to standard six. She excels in mathematics and aspires to become a mathematics teacher in the future. Maambo's parents are delighted that they did not force her to get married and can see the positive impact of education on their daughter's life.

What was achieved

The link between FGM and child marriage is strong and supporting girls to prevent forced marriage, as this project does, is an impactful step in protecting girls from FGM.

The trust that communities have in the church played an important role in the project's success, enabling up to a 50 % drop in rates of FGM.

* Child marriage has been categorized as a form of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by the UN Committee against Torture and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Source: <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/sri-lanka-child-marriage-is-legalized-torture>



A group photo of participants at the AACC's Capacity Strengthening Workshop of Male Champions for Gender Justice at the Grace Bandawe Conference Centre in Blantyre- Malawi, 19–21 July 2022.

Credits: AACC

Engaging Men in Six African Countries to Advocate for Gender Equality and Justice for Widows

Background

According to a 2017 WHO report, one in three (35 %) of women worldwide has experienced either physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner in their lifetime. As a result, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 5) is committed to “achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” (GEWE). The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) recognizes that GEWE cannot be fully achieved without the involvement of men, who are the majority in leadership and decision-making spaces, as well as gatekeepers in communities, especially in Africa. Men are critical allies for achieving GEWE and are often strong drivers of change, especially in patriarchal societies where they

can transform toxic masculinities into transformative masculinities among men and boys.

AACC further recognizes that women are not a homogeneous group but have different needs. Widows are among the women in the most vulnerable situations in Africa. According to the World Bank, one in 10 African women aged 14 and older are widows. Widows in many African communities are subject to dehumanizing treatment and experiences that rob them of their rights and dignity. Some of these cultural practices include denial of inheritance and land rights, eviction from the late husband's homes, suspicion of being witches, stigma and humiliating cultural rites.

“ I am happy to be a Gender Champion to lead and support change concerning gender equality and women’s empowerment. Proud to be associated with the AACC’s male champions.

Rev. Moyenda Kanjerwa,
AACC male champion for gender justice
in Malawi

Activities & Outputs

From 2020–2021, AACC established Platforms of Male Champions for Gender Justice in six pilot countries: Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, DRC, Cameroon, and Togo. The platforms are each composed of around 10 men that are key Christian, Muslim, and traditional leaders. The role of AACC is to accompany these platforms by strengthening their capacities to identify and eliminate all forms of GBV (gender-based violence) in each country.

In response to the marginalization of widows, AACC launched the Justice for Widows Campaign on International Widow’s Day, June 23, 2019. AACC continues to create awareness about the plight of widows and to advocate for their rights through the campaign. AACC also developed an Advocacy Tool Kit for Justice for Widows.

AACC commemorates the International Widows’ Day annually. On June 23, 2022, for example, AACC collaborated with the Malawi Council of Churches (MCC) and the Platform of Male Champions in Malawi to commemorate the day. A capacity-strengthening workshop for the champions was continued in Malawi in July 2022.



Contributing organization

All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

Further information

<https://www.aacc-ceta.org/en>

Outcomes

One of the remarkable outcomes of AACC initiatives is the unwavering commitment of male champions for gender justice, who actively promote gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE), particularly focusing on the rights of widows. In Malawi, the leading male champion for gender justice has taken it upon himself to deliver sermons in churches, raising awareness and speaking out against gender-based violence (GBV). This influential figure recognizes the urgent need to address the discrimination and dehumanization faced by widows.

In another inspiring example, a male champion has taken significant action by prohibiting under-age marriage practices within his jurisdiction. This bold step demonstrates his belief that men should actively participate in advocating for GEWE and that they should be held accountable when they perpetrate harm against women.

These stories exemplify the impact and influence of male champions for gender justice within their communities. Their dedication to challenging gender inequality, supporting widows, and combatting GBV is instrumental in driving positive change. Through their efforts, they not only advocate for GEWE but also inspire others to take a stand, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and accountability for creating a society that respects and empowers all individuals, regardless of their gender.

What was achieved

Showing collective responsibility and accountability, male champions of gender justice demonstrate unwavering commitment and actively promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, particularly focusing on the rights of widows and the prevention of underage marriages.

Transforming Faith Leaders' Attitudes About Child Marriage and Gender Equality in Senegal

Background

Channels of Hope (CoH) is a World Vision attitude and social norm change intervention that motivates and builds capacity in faith leaders to engage on sensitive issues that affect children's rights and well-being, including harmful gender norms. The approach equips faith communities to explore topics such as gender equality, child protection, maternal-child health and nutrition, and HIV and AIDS. The model has been adapted for multi-faith contexts and is used in more than 90 countries around the world, with over 500,000 faith leaders trained.

CoH for Child Protection (CoH CP) specifically addresses violence against children and seeks to foster a wider enabling environment to strengthen both formal and non-formal elements of the child protection system. It raises the awareness of faith leaders and their spouses about key child protection issues through analysis and dialogue, including reflection on religious texts. These faith leaders then mobilize local faith communities to foster an environment that advances the protection, support and well-being of all girls and boys. This process is supported by faith leader workshops, Congregational Hope Action Teams (CHATs), and regular follow-ups by World Vision.



Contributing organization

World Vision International

Further information

<https://www.wvi.org/>

“ We discuss a lot of topics with children, for example, early marriage and forced marriage. Well, an exemplary result is, if last year we had ten child marriages in our village, this year we only had one.

Mary Jackson*, the spouse of a faith leader

Activities & Outputs

Together with Queen Margaret University (QMU) in Scotland, World Vision's global research team conducted a five-year (2016–2021), multi-country, longitudinal study on Faith Communities' Contribution to Ending Violence Against Children (FCC EVAC). The study explored CoH CP pathways for change and impact at different time points across three sites representing different religious environments: Senegal (predominantly Muslim), Uganda (Christian and Muslim), and Guatemala (Christian). The study showed that faith leaders and their spouses across all three countries experienced positive changes in their attitudes toward gender equality, with harmful views about child marriage and discriminatory attitudes towards girls' education decreasing markedly following participation in CoH CP.

The CoH CP model was originally developed for Christian contexts, then a revised curriculum for Muslim contexts was developed in partnership with Islamic Relief Worldwide. In Senegal, where World Vision has used the Islamic version of the model, the longitudinal research found that the methodology was effective in mobilizing faith leaders to challenge the practice of child, early, and forced marriage.

* To protect the privacy of certain individuals their names have been changed.



Faith leader unites with spouse for child well-being in Uganda.

Credits: Obed Byamugisha

Outcomes

The percentage of faith leaders and spouses in Senegal who participated in CoH CP and who opposed the idea of marrying their daughter off young steadily increased throughout the project: from 51 % at baseline to 69 % at midline and 82 % at endline (approximately two years after attending the CoH workshop) in Senegal. Research partner Queen Margaret University suggested that this continuing increase in protective attitudes at midline and endline may be the result of the reinforcement of child protection messaging as well as indicative of a shift in faith and gender norms within the general enabling environment facilitated by CoH. Describing the attitude of local faith leaders, a male congregation member said that since CoH, “Child marriage is not accepted by imams. When there is wedding preparation, they propose to see the birth certificate of the girl first. If the child is not 18, they refuse to honor the marriage.”

Other positive changes: Interviews and focus group discussions across the three countries consistently indicated that faith leaders, their spouses, congregation members and others in the community experienced changed attitudes toward the education of girls after participating in CoH CP. In Guatemala, for example, a number of study

participants said that parents and caregivers came to realize that boys and girls should be treated equally and provided with the same opportunities: “They [parents/caregivers] used to put more value on boys than on girls before and did not give them the [same] opportunity to study. But thank God, now both males and females have the same rights” (faith leader, Guatemala).

What was achieved

In Senegal and Uganda, faith leaders said they no longer officiated marriages involving young girls and they now verify age through official documentation. A community member in Senegal shares: “Today we heard the imams talking about child marriage at a wedding ceremony. We followed their words with our young girls. To those among us who want to give their daughter in marriage before the age of 18, we advised them to avoid it because she [the girl] has not reached the age.”

Burundi Breaks Silence: Increasing Engagement of Minority Groups in Burundi

Background

In 2020, the National Council of Churches of Burundi (CNEB), a Christian organization legally registered in Burundi since 1935, initiated a training project on gender equality and women's empowerment in Kirundo and Bujumbura rural areas. The training aimed to build the capacity of women and Batwa on leadership and participation in decision-making bodies.

Burundi is made of three ethnic groups, namely, the Hutu, the Tutsi and the Batwa. The Batwa is a minority group that has been neglected for a long time by the Burundi system even though the Arusha Accord on Peace and Reconciliation (2000) has called upon the state to include them in the leadership.

In Burundi, women account for approximately 51 % of the overall population while 1 % represent the Batwa group (women and men all together). Although women and girls make up half of the country's population, they tend to be underrepresented in national decision-making bodies and suffer harmful cultural and (in certain situations) religious practices due to the misinterpretation of scriptures. Even in the few occasions that women or Batwa have managed to be part of leadership positions, their concerns have been disregarded, as most of the processes are still dominated by the patriarchal system.

The National Council of Churches of Burundi acknowledges that sustainable development is possible when diverse stakeholders and minority groups participate and are fully represented in processes to bring change. The training project was developed with the aim of addressing these challenges by raising awareness among women and Batwa, building their capacities, and enabling their engagement.

Activities & Outputs

In April 2021, 20 men and 10 women representing eight departments of the Free Methodist Church, Ngozi District engaged at church meetings for the first time in their lives in ongoing discussions with other men and women within their parishes on harmful gender practices against women and girls. The two areas of intervention were respectively on raising awareness on legal frameworks that support women and Batwa participation, build their capacities on issues of leadership, conflict management, mediation, gender, advocacy and others. The themes were identified based on the needs expressed by the women and Batwa participants and from the findings about the status of women and Batwa in the country.

During the training, several international and regional normative and legal frameworks were presented — particularly those ratified by Burundi, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW (1979), United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (UNSCR 1325), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Burundi constitution, policies and programs on the advancement of women. Most of the female participants weren't aware of the existence of articles in the frameworks that foresee their inclusion as equal interlocutors in the decision-making bodies as well as in programs and activities.

In addition, considering that CNEB's entry point is via churches, the training focused also on the Bible as a basis for analyzing spiritual texts that are often subject to misinterpretation and may lead to harmful practices in places of worship.



A picture of women and children in Burundi. Credits: GIZ/Britta Radike

Outcomes

After the training, booklets for Training of Trainers (ToTs) were provided that aim to equip the participants with the tools to replicate the lessons learned in sensitizing other women about their rights and space to participate in decision making.

Building on the success of the training, a campaign named Tamar took place that included the organization of consecutive gatherings in the parishes to study the Bible script and contextualize it to gender-based violence. These gatherings created a safe space for women to break silence, share experiences about challenges faced in their families and helped them in the healing process from their traumas.

The most positive outcome of the project activities is the increased confidence of women and Batwa to engage in the church activities and overall in the parishes.



Contributing organization

National Council of Churches of Burundi (CNEB)

Further information

<https://cneb.bi/>

“ Before these sessions, I felt bad in my heart. I experienced moments of headaches, lost appetite because of the violence in my house. Today I feel free emotionally. I am happy and have hope. No headache, I have joy.

Miburo*, participant of CNEB training

The impact of the project was evident in different contexts, from individual and psychosocial to effects on family and public life. According to feedback from the participants, the discussions and particularly the focus on spiritual text, namely, the Bible, helped women to cope with their mental health and traumas.

The project strongly contributed to the implementation of SDG 5 and particularly target 5.4: “Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.” In particular, the training and discussions in the context of the churches have influenced the way males reacted to activities traditionally perceived as female responsibilities. Female and male participants reported that men are engaging more in family activities such as caring for children while women prepare food, helping their wives on the farm, and washing or feeding young children. For these women, this was something new because housework, children, and farming are areas of glaring gender inequality.

What was achieved

The provinces where the project was implemented have recorded more women and Batwa from the grassroots level engaging in conflict management. Due to progress in community structures, women and Batwa are now motivated and ready to be more engaged in decision-making bodies.

* To protect the privacy of certain individuals their names have been changed.

She for Dialogue: Women’s Empowerment in the Field of Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding in the Arab Region

Background

The International Dialogue Centre – KAICIID Arab Region Programme launched the interreligious, intercultural and peacebuilding dialogue process, “She for Dialogue” in the Arab region in 2022. The project aims to empower women who are religious actors and civil society activists through interreligious and intercultural dialogue as well as peacebuilding. The project has been engaging women of diverse religious backgrounds from countries across the Arab region in a series of three consecutive 5-day workshops, held in different countries throughout the fellowship year. The ultimate goal is to move them to action: participants are supported to lead initiatives in their communities, emphasizing a gender perspective to addressing pressing women’s issues, mobilizing stakeholders, and providing solutions.

Activities & Outputs

A concrete example of an implemented initiative is “From Women Comes Peace” (منهن سلام), a collaborative effort between four fellowship participants—two Muslim and two Christian preachers from Cairo, Egypt—who worked in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Endowments, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Evangelical

“ The ‘Men Hunna Salam’ (From Women Comes Peace) signifies the first time a diverse group of 32 women have come together to discuss their roles as female leaders contributing to peacebuilding in Egypt.

Awatef Amin, SHE for Dialogue Fellow

Organization. The workshop targeting 28 women religious actors aimed to evaluate existing practices on enhancing women’s participation in their local context; examine opportunities and challenges; and make recommendations to address any gaps.

Greater awareness was created among the participants as to the possibilities and range of existing activities that promote the values of (inclusive, common) citizenship, and peaceful coexistence in the country. The participants expressed the willingness to focus on awareness-raising, addressing violence, and confronting harmful practices that infringe upon the rights of girls, particularly issues such as female genital mutilation and child marriage.

Outcomes

Despite their diverse religious backgrounds, these women leaders, united by their mutual vision to bring change, have found common ground and put together a set of strategic recommendations to serve as guiding principles for their respective religious institutions. The recommendations were defined as follows: Aiming to contribute to SDGs, with a special focus on SDG 5, particularly 5.1 (end all forms of discrimination), 5.3 (eliminate harmful practices), and 5.5 (effective participation). Their recommendations include:

1. Create a cultural and institutional environment supportive of women’s participation and their access to decision-making positions
2. Develop capacity building programs on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, and social cohesion for female preachers and actors in religious institutions.
3. Expand the scope of contributions of women religious actors, especially among young generations in schools, universities, youth centers, and cultural institutions.



32 women religious leaders collaboratively identifying challenges, opportunities, and recommendations to enhance their roles in promoting gender-inclusive interfaith dialogue in Egypt.

Credits: International Dialogue Centre – KAICIID

4. Optimize and effectively use social media to promote dialogue, diversity, and respect.
5. Extend dialogue beyond elite circles to broader social spheres, including media and educational institutions.
6. Produce publications in the area of interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding in collaboration with research centers.

Practically, the She for Dialogue community initiatives in the Arab region, and particularly, the “From women comes Peace” – *منهن سلام* initiative in Egypt manifest their impact across three key levels:

Thematic Impact: Integrated into interreligious dialogue, they are bringing attention to critical issues related to social peace and social cohesion in Egypt, especially, combating violence in general and domestic violence in particular and enhancing gender-sensitive religious discourses.

Institutional Impact: Enhancing women’s participation in religious institutions in Egypt by seizing current opportunities in the country where political and religious circles are gradually opening up space for women to engage in awareness-raising efforts.

Social Impact: Demonstrating that women religious actors can serve as agents of change within their communities by reaching out to women, youth, children, refugees, and vulnerable groups.



Contributing organization

The International Dialogue Centre – KAICIID

Further information

<https://www.kaiciid.org/>

What was achieved

While women religious actors undoubtedly encounter cultural and institutional challenges, **She for Dialogue** and its participants’ initiatives underscore that gender-sensitive interreligious dialogue processes are not only feasible but also crucial to fostering coexistence.

Using Freedom of Religion or Belief as a Tool to Strengthen Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

Background

Most interventions on gender discrimination lack consideration of religious/belief identity for women and girls. The few that do reference the role of religion in achieving gender equality, tend to do so in an exclusively negative manner. Similarly, most of the data collection on violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is often gender blind, assuming that men and women experience FoRB violations in the same way. There is a need for more intersectional approaches in human rights advocacy, and concretely to strengthen the FoRB perspective among gender equality activists, as well as to strengthen the gender perspective among FoRB/religious actors.

Activities & Outputs

As Stefanus Alliance International (SAI) has become increasingly aware that violations of FoRB affect men and women differently, it was decided to build on their trademark booklet, “Freedom of Religion or Belief for Everyone,” by developing a second edition called, “Freedom of Religion or Belief for Everyone: Women in Focus.” The new booklet aims to highlight women’s FoRB experiences by addressing major misconceptions around the intersection of FoRB and women’s rights, identifying common factors undermining women’s FoRB, and also offering suggestions for strengthening the two rights together.

The booklet acts as an initial step in raising awareness about how FoRB and gender equality rights cannot only coexist but are actually mutually reinforcing one another. By raising awareness how this looks like in theory and in practice, the booklet serves as an educational tool, cultivating the understanding among FoRB- and religious actors that a complete ‘FoRB for all’ approach demands consideration of gender, and that genuine gender equal-

ity hinges on securing FoRB for women. Moreover, the booklet strives to encourage enhanced collaboration and synergies among the diverse actors involved in advancing both FoRB and gender equality initiatives.

Gender-disaggregated research suggests that while religious persecution against men tends to be focused and visible, religious persecution against women tends to be complex and hidden. Recent reports also document that women tend to be disproportionately more affected by FoRB violations than men, both in terms of frequency and severity.

Women are more likely to be subject to discrimination and persecution based on their religion or belief because of their gender. In many countries women also appear to be targets of double and triple forms of discrimination because of the intersections between their gender, religion or belief affiliation, and socio-economic status. Discrimination based on these different identity markers tends to be reinforcing.

FoRB is a human right, equally inherent to men and women. But it is often the case that FoRB is (mis)used to defend practices undermining gender equality and that are harmful for women and girls. The misconception or misuse of FoRB to justify violations of other rights is illegitimate. It is therefore important to better understand



Contributing organization

Stefanus Alliance International (SAI)

Further information

<https://www.stefanus-usa.org/>

“ Literature on Freedom of Religion or Belief needs to address the disproportionate impact of violations against particular segments of the population. This publication is an example of precisely that while also showing how addressing these violations gives rise to additional benefits.

Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, who was part of the reference group for creating the booklet

FoRB in its own right, as well as how it relates to gender equality, to avoid confusion around practices protected by FoRB and practices that violate FoRB.

Although the limited literature on the normative framework around the intersection of FoRB and gender equality has expanded in recent years, new contributions have tended to be restricted to academic and political papers. The women and girls around the world who are most often subject to double-discrimination and violations that intersect with both their right to FoRB and their right to gender equality do not have access to this type of literature. This means that the millions of women and girls around the world who could benefit from this knowledge are effectively missing out on the possibility to learn about how their rights intersect, as well as the tools that these rights offer to counter the harmful norms and practices used against them.

Outcomes

Wanting to create a learning tool that could be accessible and relevant to as many as possible, SAI undertook several editorial rounds of the booklet manuscript to ensure that the language used is understandable and digestible to a wide variety of audiences. The process of developing the content included convening experts who work on these issues from numerous perspectives and foster discussions and peer-to-peer learning among them, to establish a clearer normative framework of the two rights, meaning how they relate to one another according to international human rights law. The aim was to emphasize how FoRB and gender equality can actually complement



The booklet presented at a conference on Women, Rights and Religion, in Byblos, Lebanon in June 2022. From the left: Vija Herefoss (co-author), Nayla Tabbara (consulted expert contributor), Saumya Uma (consulted expert contributor), Elisa Chavez (co-author). Credits: Adyan Foundation

each other, contrary to commonly presented narratives. This process was done in consultation with both in-house and external human rights experts, including the current and former UN Special Rapporteurs on FoRB. Since its English publication in 2021, SAI's booklet on FoRB & women's equality has been requested for presentation in conferences and spaces addressing human rights and/or religion in almost 20 countries. The product has received praise as a trailblazing, easy-to-read, and useful tool in strengthening women's equality and FoRB together. It has also been translated to Arabic, French, and Norwegian, with plans for further translations into Portuguese, Spanish, and Urdu.

What was achieved

The booklet on FoRB and women's equality offers concrete knowledge on how to use FoRB as a tool to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It illustrates how we can consider the two rights as mutually reinforcing one another, how we cannot achieve 'FoRB for all' without a gender perspective, nor achieve gender equality without a FoRB perspective, and that how according to human rights law, women should never have to choose between their freedom and their faith.

Reflections on Intersectionality in the Documentation of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in North Korea

Background

Recent conversations initiated by Korea Future have highlighted the importance of civil society organizations using gender-sensitive, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered documentation and analysis practices. While some global good practice guidance materials for documentation have been developed, including The Hague Principles and the Murad Code, no single resource has been able to fully address the challenges related to documenting sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

It has been a decade since a United Nations Commission of Inquiry (COI) acknowledged that, in the DPRK, “violence against women, in particular sexual violence, proved to be difficult to document owing to the stigma and shame that still attaches to the victims” and further stated that, “its inquiry may have only partially captured the extent of relevant violations.”

Fostering a culture among investigators that prioritizes survivors' diverse needs during documentation based on their intersecting identities (as women who are survivors of SGBV and who are also religious) can also shed new light on specific human rights violations that affect

“ Men undergo tough times at detention centers in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Women undergo shameful times.

Kim So-yeon*, SGBV survivor in the DPRK

individuals and groups of people who are vulnerable based on these intersecting identities. This is certainly the case for people who are denied the right to Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) in the DPRK.

While religious freedom was not a substantive area of focus for the COI, it nevertheless found “that there is an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as of the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, information, and association.” The DPRK has systematically violated the right to FoRB for over seven decades through institutionalized efforts to enforce a singular ideology known as Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. In lessons at school, students are taught about the “evils” of religion. In higher education, instruction on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism continues through twice-weekly study sessions and lectures on the words and teachings of the Supreme Leader. When North Koreans enter adulthood, warnings against religious beliefs continue in a similar manner. Penalties for noncompliance can result in imprisonment or execution.



Contributing organization

Korea Future

Further information

<https://www.koreafuture.org/>

* To protect the privacy of certain individuals their names have been changed.



Korea Future conducts a human rights workshop.

Credits: Korea Future

Activities & Outputs

Using an intersectional lens in the documentation of human rights violations in the DPRK can connect violations of the right to FoRB with the denial of other fundamental human rights, including the right to not be subject to acts that amount to SGBV. Korea Future has documented numerous such incidents in the North Korean Prison Database, an online archive of our findings that is free to access in Korean and English.

In cases where victims were religious women, many experienced violations that intersected with their gender identities. One survivor told investigators that “men undergo tough times at detention centers. Women undergo shameful times.”

In this context, it is notable that religious women have emerged as agents of change on the margins of society in the DPRK. Confronted with social, economic, and political marginalization, women have been forced into environments beyond the limits of the state where they are, for the first time, able to access information about religion and belief. In some cases, women were able to illicitly earn money and support their families through Shamanic practices or become local Christian leaders, albeit in secret, and practice the right to FoRB for the first time.

To fully address the challenges related to documenting these cases, Korea Future collaborates with organizations led by exiled women and men, psychosocial service providers, and other civil society organizations to establish and communicate gender-sensitive, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered documentation practices. Korea Future intends for these collaborations to serve as a starting point for continued reflections on how individuals and organizations investigating human rights violations in the DPRK can best document information so that we may better respond to its unique challenges.

What was achieved

Collaborations in the DPRK which address the intersectional nature of sexual and gender-based violence aim to promote trauma-informed and survivor-centered practices by involving psychosocial service providers and organizations led by exiled women and men. These collaborations offer a starting point for addressing the unique challenges facing sexual and gender-based violence in the DPRK.



Empowering the next generation to find their way towards the principles of equality.

Credits: Masrtopia

Masrtopia – the Dream of Equality in Egypt

Background

Masrtopia is an initiative that focuses on working with children aged 10 to 14 in Egypt. Its primary goal is to provide interactive activities that allow children to explore the principles of equality.

Activities & Outputs

The initiative offers two avenues for children to engage: the Masrtopia camp and the Masrtopia workshop. Masrtopia actively promotes women's leadership and encourages equal involvement in public and political affairs, ensuring that women and religious minorities are given equal opportunities.

When it comes to enrolling volunteers in Masrtopia, it is required that at least half are girls. The activities within the program are specifically designed to emphasize that success and enjoyment are interconnected with coopera-

tion between boys and girls, as well as between Muslims and Christians within the team. Children also learn the importance of trust and collaboration with the facilitators, who are volunteers that include a 50 % representation of Christian women.

In the Masrtopia camp, children are invited to participate in an election process to govern an imaginary island. This election follows a closed list system, ensuring that gender and religion are equally represented amongst the candidates.



Contributing organization

Ibrahimia Media Center (IMC)

Further information

<https://imcegypt.net/>

“ Masrtopia let me discover my leadership abilities to become a leader and that’s what happened.

Maddona, Masrtopia camp participant

Outcomes

Masrtopia aims to create a coherent and meaningful experience for both children and facilitators, emphasizing the importance of gender equality as a fundamental human right. The initiative encourages girls to step forward as candidates and actively participate in political life while also challenging boys and those from the religious majority to seriously envision and consider electing girls or candidates from different religious backgrounds. By doing so, Masrtopia strives to foster a sense of inclusivity and acceptance among all participants.

The underlying principle of Masrtopia is to create an environment where boys and girls are invited to come together and collaborate as equal human beings, emphasizing mutual respect and embracing their differences. Gender equality is promoted through various means, including the encouragement of women’s leadership and active political participation, as well as rejecting violence as a solution to conflicts that may arise within the group.

Overall, Masrtopia serves as a platform that not only imparts valuable lessons and experiences to children but also inspires them to become agents of change within their communities.

Since the camp’s establishment in 2012 and the workshop’s establishment in 2016, Masrtopia has witnessed the profound and positive impact it has on children who have previously participated in its programs. Countless stories of inspiration and transformation have emerged from these experiences, with many children expressing a strong desire to give back by becoming volunteers for future camps.

One remarkable example is Maddona Rizk, who participated in the Masrtopia workshop in 2018. Through her involvement, she discovered her passion for media and developed her leadership skills. This newfound confi-



Masrtopia is an experiment where girls find their way to complete rights.

Credits: Masrtopia

dence propelled her to serve as a volunteer at the Masrtopia camp in 2022, where she dedicated herself to guiding and supporting other children.

Another example involves Ziad, a child who participated in the Masrtopia camp in 2018. Within the camp’s inclusive and accepting atmosphere, Ziad experienced a sense of belonging and equality that had been absent from his previous school environment, which was plagued by violence. Encouraged by the positive experiences at Masrtopia, Ziad found the courage to return to school, confident in his ability to navigate challenges and thrive in a more peaceful setting.

These anecdotes serve as testaments to the program’s ability to empower children, foster their self-belief, and inspire them to create positive change in their own lives and communities.

What was achieved

Stories of inspiration and transformation have emerged, with many children wanting to give back by volunteering for future camps, providing leadership for other children and promoting a peaceful and empowering setting.



This picture is part of the [virtual art gallery](#) created by Mission East in the frame of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

Credit: Mission East

Upholding Rights of Women Survivors in Sinjar, Iraq

Background

A decade of instability has resulted from the violent insurgency of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which took place from 2014 to 2017 and led to genocide and systemic abuses against various local communities and caused massive displacement. In 2014, Sinjar witnessed the abduction, torture, brutal killings, forced child labor, and sex slavery of thousands of people, primarily Yazidis. The town was left in ruins, with destroyed houses and limited services and livelihoods. It is in this context of devastation that Mission East (ME) has been actively working to protect the rights of the most vulnerable individuals in these persecuted communities in Sinjar.

Activities & Outputs

One intended impact of Mission East's engagement in Iraq is that vulnerable individuals, especially women and children, will have improved access to survivor-centered services, legal rights and entitlements, and enhanced community-based protection mechanisms.



Contributing organization

Mission East, a member of the EU-CORD network

Further information

<https://missioneast.org/en>

“ I was so close to death 13 times. I wished for death, but my children were my only hope and encouraged me to bear the pain. Even after I was released from captivity, I couldn't get rid of those tragic memories, and I couldn't forget about my other family members. Those memories made me feel depressed and helpless. The idea of committing suicide crossed my mind many times. I thank Mission East for taking care of me and giving me a chance to find a new way in life.

Lalish Murad*, participant of ME program

The main objectives of the protection services are to address the immediate protection concerns of vulnerable women, youth, and girls, and further empower them by linking them with various other services in an integrated, holistic manner. ME also links case management services with Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services and legal services (for civil documentation). Confidential referral mechanisms are further used to connect women and girls to other organizations providing services such as health and education.



Another example from the virtual art gallery collection. Credit: Mission East

Outcomes

In 2022, as a direct result of the Mission East project, 45 survivors who participated in the program successfully launched new businesses, while an additional 13 survivors received support in scaling up their existing businesses.

Mission East facilitated the referral of 160 cases for diverse assistance, including cash aid, cash-for-work programs, dignity kits, shelter repair, small business support, and access to legal and psychiatric services, directing these cases to various organizations within the region. Through the provision of these integrated services, women and girls affected by the traumatic experiences during the occupation by ISIL are finding ways to cope and rebuild their lives, fostering independence and empowerment.

Addressing immediate protection needs through case management and mitigating risks by reinforcing indigenous protection mechanisms via community-based protection approaches have significantly bolstered the capacity of local communities to shield vulnerable individuals from the ongoing risk of exploitation and abuse.

What was achieved

Local capacity to shield those vulnerable to exploitation and abuse has been increased by reinforcing indigenous protection mechanisms via community-based approaches. Through the provision of these integrated services, women and girls affected by the traumatic experiences during the occupation of ISIL are finding ways to cope and rebuild their lives, fostering independence and empowerment.

* To protect the privacy of certain individuals their names have been changed.

Reform at the Kadhis Court in Kenya to Provide Access to Justice for Women and Girls

Background

Established in 2019, Africa Muslim Women Action Network (AMWAN) is a Muslim women-led organization. A member of the Kenya chapter of the Side by Side Faith for Gender Justice Movement, a global interfaith movement established in 2016 with the aim of advocating for and implementing impactful interventions to achieve gender justice at local and international levels, AMWAN has been advocating for women's empowerment in Kenya since its inception. Their long-term goal is to enable the development of a just and progressive society.

Organizations run by Muslim women, like AMWAN, are seeking spaces to advocate for the rights of their target

groups and support their voices in being heard locally. Lobbying is an ongoing process and joint efforts to support building the capacity of religious leaders on Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) and on gender equality are needed. AMWAN works in partnership with litigators, the judiciary, the office of the Chief Kadhis of Kenya, the religious community, and women leaders, across different branches of the country and the national government.

The majority of Kenya's communities are patriarchal and the application of Muslim law in the Kadhis courts in Kenya, similar to other jurisdictions, is highly dependent on social customs and norms that greatly influence access to justice for women and girls. The lack of Muslim-codified laws in Kenya is a big hindrance to justice delivery at the

Kwale Training of Trainers (ToT) Workshop at Jacaranda Hotel in August 2021.

Credits: AMWAN



“ The Women’s Conference and the interactions with the Kadhis court and Islamic scholars has proved to be not only interactive but also educative.

Tumu Ali Nzaro*,
participant of AMWAN project

Kadhis court. Disadvantaged litigants appearing before the Kadhis courts, particularly women and children, find it difficult to bypass social and family barriers to assert their rights in the courts. Some are unaware of their rights and how to engage the courts, while others may fear retaliation or alienation from family and community when they present their case.

In this context, in 2020, AMWAN implemented a project named “Women’s Access to Justice” to support reforms at the Kadhis Court in Kenya (Sharia court). The project included a Training of Trainers (ToT) that sought to empower Muslims, with special attention to disadvantaged populations such as women, children, and other vulnerable sections of the populations, in accessing justice and expanding access to legal services on matters related to personal status, marriage, divorce, inheritance, probate and the administration of estates of deceased Muslims. The toolkit also informs Muslim women of the rules of procedure, practice, and applicable law in the Kadhis courts so they know their legal rights related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and related family matters without needing to engage a lawyer.



Contributing organization

Africa Muslim Women Action Network (AMWAN)

Further information

<https://amwan.africa/>

<https://web.facebook.com/amwanafrica/>

<https://youtu.be/YUMeARTMR7E>

In partnership with the judiciary system, the project included the development of a toolkit indicating ways to reform the Kadhis Court to comply with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Kenya and to appoint women Kadhis as judges. The toolkit presents rules of procedures, practices, and applicable law in the Kadhis courts for litigants appearing before the Kadhis courts in Kenya.

Activities & Outputs

AMWAN centralized its activities in Mombasa, Kilifi, and Kwale, working tirelessly with women leaders, girls and representatives from the Kadhis Court alongside Islamic scholars. The project included:

- » A training on gender equality addressing case studies from the implementation of CEDAW at the Kadhis Court;
- » The organization of a conference where women leaders were brought together with religious and judicial members representing the Kadhis court to discuss the extent to which women could access justice systems within the society as well as issues of gender parity at the Kadhis court;
- » A toolkit on legal rights at the Kadhis court, particularly for Muslim women.
- » A Baseline Survey Report on Mombasa, Kwale, and Kilifi Counties on strengthening Muslim Women’s access to justice at the Kadhis court in Kenya.
- » Data samples were used to determine levels of knowledge and practice of Islamic concepts on matters related to accessing the Kadhis court, marriage, inheritance, polygamy, children’s rights, and general awareness of the Muslim community of rules and procedures. Part of the training was streamed online, and the public increasingly requested that AMWAN reach out to other national Muslim women and have an accessible version of the toolkit made available to the public, preferably in the local language of Swahili.

* To protect the privacy of certain individuals their names have been changed.

Outcomes

Over the course of the project period, AMWAN worked to strengthen Women's Access to Justice with the aim of supporting the implementation of SDG 5 and particularly target 5.5: "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life." The Women's Access to Justice project contributed to:

1. Accelerating the capacity of women and girls and building their confidence in understanding and claiming their rights. Muslim communities in Kwale, Mombasa, and Kilifi became aware of their rights on Islamic Sharia and Kenyan law and empowered women to access the justice system at the Kadhis court in Kenya. A number of women have already started accessing the Kadhis court to seek advice for their marital, personal status, and succession issues.
2. Making Kadhis court more open to gender equality and accessible to women and girls. The beneficiaries of the project reported an increased understanding of judicial processes.
3. Enhancing legal policies towards attaining women's access to justice. AMWAN has developed and built local networks with CBOs and FBOs for strategic partnerships advocating for women's rights and working towards judicial reforms.

Radio Show on International Women's Day 2024 at Sauti ya Pwani FM 94.2 in Mombasa, aiming to strengthen the Kadhis court of Kenya in making it Human Rights compliant. From the left, Nicholas Songora, Ulfat Masibo, Radio Presenter. Credits: AMWAN



The Women's Access to Justice project was evaluated as something unique to the coastal counties, as the communities involved had not previously engaged in a similar initiative. Its agenda addressed the main challenges locally as well as long-term misconceptions about gender-based violence and gender inequalities, such as access to justice. The project has increased awareness about human rights at the individual and community levels. It provided paralegals who guided women through their cases and sought out the best ways to seek redress.

As this initiative was a pilot project, AMWAN has signed an MOU with Kenya Judiciary Academy for partnerships to ensure its sustainability; they will take the trainings to all other Kadhis (judicial officers) in Kenya working at the Kadhis court at the national level.

AMWAN is contributing to the development of the Mombasa Action Plan as the head of the legal pillar by convening diverse actors and implementing projects on preventing and countering violent extremism. AMWAN are also members of several court-user committees (CUC) in Mombasa County including the Shanzu specialized sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) court, the interfaith movement Side by Side, and a member of the coast consortium of NGOs known by the Swahili name, *Jumuiya ya mashrika ya pwani*, a consortium working on advocacy in the coastal region. AMWAN are also founding members of the newly-formed PaRD Africa Voice.

What was achieved

The women's conferences and interactions with the Kadhis court and Islamic scholars have proven to be not only interactive but also educational. Pertinent issues and differences between the Islamic Sharia and the Kenyan law have been resolved, resulting in an increased interest in continuing this project as communities seek justice for women at the Kadhis court.



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