

Change from the Inside Out

Liberian Faith Leaders and Youth Strengthening Community Prevention and Response to Violence Against Women and Girls



A Summary of the Program Evaluation Report 2018-2022

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Funders



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Implementing Organizations

Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief and Development (ECLRD)

Monrovia, Liberia

ECLRD is the program arm of the Episcopal Diocese which has been partnering with Episcopal Relief & Development since 2005. The program focuses on two areas: women's economic empowerment geared towards improving the social and economic well-being and livelihoods of women and addressing gender-based violence against women and girls. ECLRD takes a faith-based approach, engaging Christian and Muslim clerics and lay leaders, including women and youth in social and behavior change strategies. ECLRD mobilizes these networks for effective disaster relief and recovery, as with the Ebola crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnering with Episcopal Relief & Development since 2005, ECLRD programs coordinate with government and other multisector stakeholders to ensure resources reach the most marginalized communities.

Episcopal Relief & Development

New York City, USA; Africa Regional Office - Accra, Ghana

Episcopal Relief & Development has been working together with partners and supporters to fight poverty, disease and disaster in marginalized communities around the world for more than 80 years. Each year the organization facilitates programs for almost 3 million people so they can achieve healthier, more fulfilling lives. An independent 501(c)(3), Episcopal Relief & Development leverages the expertise and resources of Anglican and other implementing partners to deliver results in three signature program areas: Women, Children and Climate Resilience.

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National Faith Leaders Advisory Coalition (NFLAC), a national body made up of interfaith faith leaders.

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Executive Summary

Thousands of Christian and Muslim faith leaders – men, women and youth – have spearheaded change in rural Liberian communities to achieve two goals: 1. to prevent violence against women and girls and 2. to strengthen survivors' support and access to services. They were part of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) program first launched in 2015 by a partnership of Episcopal Relief & Development with the Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief and Development (ECLRD) organization. From 2018 to 2022, the program expanded from two to four counties, with 54 total rural communities. The program made adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which overall violence against women and girls (VAWG) increased in Liberia.

A 2022 comprehensive evaluation found that the program demonstrated the power of investing in faith leaders and youth in catalyzing community change to prevent and respond to VAWG, starting with their own attitudes and actions. This report is a summary drawn from the [full evaluation report](#), a quasi-experimental, mixed methods study. The evaluation documented a range of positive impacts from the program, with improvements in participants' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors including:

- 1 Decreased intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced by women from 41% to 33%.** The prevalence of all forms of IPV and NPSV was significantly lower among female congregants who participated in the program's faith-based activities with VAWG discussed, compared with those who did not.

- 2 Decreased adolescent boys' IPV perpetration; decreased men's IPV perpetration in three of four counties.**

- 3 Improved anti-VAWG and gender-equitable attitudes for all congregant groups (i.e., men, women, adolescent boys and girls):** Percentage of adolescent boys rejecting rape myths increased from 47% to 75%.

- 4 Increased knowledge of available VAWG services for survivors:** Women who knew about VAWG services increased from 48% to 86%, while the percentage of girls with knowledge doubled.

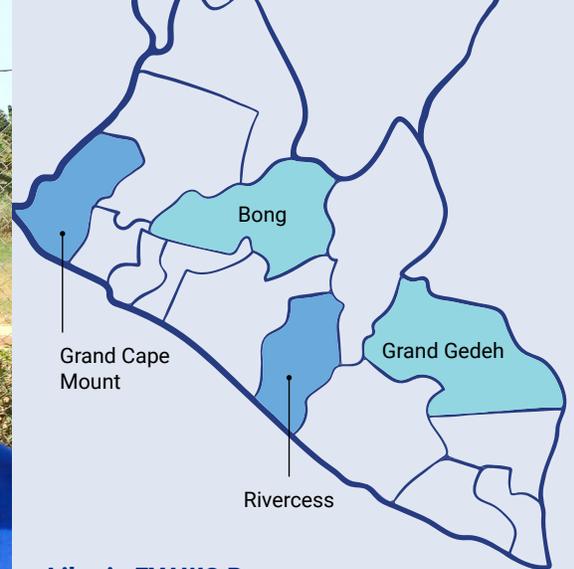
Findings also demonstrated the effectiveness of the program's social and behavior change (SBC) strategies, training and communication tools. Leaders were first mobilized and equipped as agents of change then they spoke out, led SBC dialogues and took action. For many faith leaders, this involved engaging in an experiential learning process with scriptures to change their own beliefs prior to committing to EVAWG activism. Successful strategies included:

- Faith leaders spoke out with congregations and communities.
- Leaders facilitated Facts-Meaning-Association-Action picture card dialogues.¹²
- Youth used creative arts (storytelling, role playing, etc.) to deliver key messages with Christian and Muslim youth groups at schools, community events and radio shows.

In addition to increased resistance to VAWG, the evaluation highlighted other key indications of sustainability, such as improved community systems addressing VAWG and VAWG reporting. The evaluators also made recommendations for enhancing the Liberia program while replicating or adapting its best practices in similar initiatives. As the Liberia EVAWG program demonstrated, engaging faith and youth leaders early in a learning process about their own beliefs ensures they can serve as powerful champions, transforming communities from the inside out, so that women and girls can live free from violence, in dignity and respect.



Three girls advocate for the enforcement of the National Code of Conduct for School Administrators and Teachers (CoC).



**Liberia EVAWG Program
2015-2022**

- 2015-2022: Rivercess, Grand Cape Mount
 - 2018-2022: Bong, Grand Gedeh
-
- 2018-2022: 54 communities

1

**Violence Against Women and Girls:
Prevention and Response Program**

Liberia has high rates of violence against women and girls (VAWG).¹ Yet, even in the face of generational trauma, deeply rooted religious beliefs and social norms, people can change their attitudes and behaviors. Faith leaders and youth have a critical role to play in that change. The challenge is *how*. The Liberia EVAWG program (referred to hereafter as ‘the program’) to prevent and respond to VAWG successfully mobilized and equipped faith leaders and youth with social and behavior change strategies and tailored tools – so that, despite some resistance, they succeeded in reducing VAWG and expanded survivors’ support in their communities.

The effectiveness of the program’s social and behavior change strategies based on faith leaders and youth was among the top-level findings of the program evaluation. The faith-based, community-led program’s expansion phase from 2018-2022 engaged a total of 54 rural communities in four counties.² This phase was known as the “Scaling Up Faith Leaders’ Engagement to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Women and Girls Program.”

**Program Activities’
Cumulative
Participation***



60,231

women and girls



4,190

women and girl survivors



14,056

men and boys

**these reflect an unknown number of unique individuals, since the program was designed for congregants and community members to participate in multiple activities*

Figure 1: Program Model



Building on the promising progress of the program's first phase,³ staff and leaders worked to strengthen results toward achieving the program's goals:

- 1 Women and girls experience less intimate partner violence⁴ and non-partner sexual violence.
- 2 Women and girl survivors of violence have increased support and access to VAWG services.

This ongoing initiative is implemented by the Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief and Development (ECLRD) organization, in partnership with Episcopal Relief & Development. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused some major disruptions and likely tempered its outcomes, the program continued, making strategic adaptations in response to pandemic-related restrictions and its fallout. As elsewhere in the world, incidences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) rose in Liberia during the pandemic, with poverty and food insecurity worsening. The negative effects were disproportionately borne by women and girls. Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD

commissioned a [qualitative study](#)⁵ to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls in the program areas in order to strengthen programmatic responses. In light of study findings, the program directed targeted financial assistance and Savings & Loan Group membership to the most vulnerable groups, including survivors and women with disabilities.

The program's social and behavior change approach⁶ is centered in the role of religion and culture, focusing on faith leaders' influence on maintaining the status quo or changing social norms and individual behaviors. Additionally, it invests in youth leaders who, themselves, have influence, and are critical to transforming the mindsets of their peers and communities, producing long-term, generational impact. Moreover, the program also engages women directly through Savings & Loan Groups⁷ to strengthen their economic empowerment and tackle VAWG issues. The multilevel and multisector coordination strengthens impact, government accountability, local ownership and long-term sustainability for VAWG prevention and response.



Faith leaders on a radio show discussing VAWG topics.

2

Results

The evaluation identified a range of positive impacts achieved through the program, with clear evidence of improvements in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors associated with participation.¹⁰ At the outcome level, section 2.1, the initiative achieved its intended goals, outcomes and outputs to a medium level, which is meaningful progress given the COVID-19 pandemic effects. There were also a few indicators showing no change or negative change, which was not unexpected given the complexities of VAWG issues.

At the outcome level, section 2.1, the program had high impact and the output results were also strong overall. Faith leaders and youth leaders as agents of change proved effective, with positive impact documented for almost all indicators.

At the goal level, section 2.2, the program achieved a medium level, since some findings were mixed for both the program participants and in terms of statistical significance measured against the comparison county (comparison group data was only used at the goal level). These results need to be read through the lens of an imperfect comparison group, since a number of VAWG prevention and response programs were unexpectedly implemented in the comparison county after baseline. Therefore, this summary report focuses on changes in the program areas from baseline to endline, particularly where qualitative data indicated that participants attributed improvements to the program. For complete analysis of statistical significance with the comparison group, see the full evaluation report.¹¹

Three types of program results are presented. The effectiveness section outlines the program outcomes achieved through its strategies. The impact section presents key findings for achievement of the program's two goals. Lastly, substantiation for the sustainability of the program and its impact is shared.



Social & Behavior Change Communication Methods

Interpersonal and Group

FAMA dialogues
Sermons
Scripture studies
Marriage and family counseling

Community Mobilization

Drama performances
Storytelling
16 Days of Activism
Community events

Social Media

Radio shows by faith and youth leaders



Imagine a group of students taking turns looking at an image of a young man making an unwanted sexual advance toward a teenage girl. Together, the students discuss what they see in the picture, whether they've experienced anything like it, how they feel as a result and what they can do to prevent these situations and foster positive interactions.

"Our traditions were highly respected, so...it was very hard to overcome."

Male Faith Leader, Rivercess

"The family of the perpetrator [of rape] will point at you, saying 'you are the cause of the person going to jail' and maybe threaten you."

Male Congregant, Bong

"...they taught us about the FAMA cards, we use it when we go into the community. Once, we were able to use it to discuss child marriage."

Adolescent Male Congregant, Bong

2.1 Effectiveness of Program Strategies

The program trained and deployed three types of leaders: faith, youth and women's Savings & Loan group leaders. The evaluation found all three types successfully used the FAMA dialogue process plus various social and behavior change communication (SBCC) techniques suited to their spheres of influence. This was despite some resistance they encountered in their volunteer work, since they were often going against dominant, long-held cultural norms and practices such as opposing child marriage, talking about women having equal rights or disclosing rape cases and insisting on these being reported to the police. Nevertheless, the leaders identified various factors that made their activism easier over time, citing patience and perseverance among others, as more people became active themselves in VAWG prevention and response work.

2.1.1 FAMA Dialogues: A Reflection-Learning-Action Process

Data confirmed that dialogues using the Facts, Association, Meaning, Action or FAMA¹² process with picture cards were integral to people changing their attitudes and behaviors. Each card has a picture on one side illustrating either a positive or negative aspect of VAWG, gender equality or healthy relationships. The back contains a facilitator-guided sequence of questions for participants to discuss.

The FAMA picture cards were designed in consultation with faith leaders to ensure that they are contextually appropriate and easily recognizable. That is a key part of why they worked: participants could point to situations and people on the card and see themselves or others they knew. The story-driven images were especially useful in rural Liberian communities with low levels of education and high levels of illiteracy. The



Muslim and Christian faith leaders with FAMA cards and Toolkit.

leaders trained as facilitators identified FAMA card dialogues as a critical process for encouraging community members to reflect, share personal stories and formulate their own ideas and solutions to VAWG.

2.1.2 Faith Leaders as Agents of Change

In Liberia, some 97 percent of people identify as Christian or Muslim¹³ with faith leaders serving as respected members of society. The program's faith leaders comprised pastors and imams and lay leaders; these were adults and youth, male and female. Most of the adult faith leaders were men, reflecting the local reality. Youth faith leaders and their Christian and Muslim youth groups were very active in contributing to program results; see Youth Leader section 2.1.3.

Initially, there were some faith leaders who chose not to participate due to lack of understanding or disagreement with the program approach or goals. However, the many faith leaders who did, went on to become strong advocates for ending VAWG. The faith leaders started with an experiential learning process in a five-day workshop. Trained facilitators guide the process with the program's *Gender-Based Violence Prevention & Response Toolkit: A Facilitation Guide for Faith Leaders in Liberia*, which has 33 modules.¹⁴

The workshops provided a safe space for participants to express themselves and their beliefs, which proved especially helpful in cases where some believed violence against women is justified according to scripture. Each faith leader was invited to reflect on and, if needed, reconsider their religious beliefs, attitudes and behaviors related to VAWG and gender equality. Faith leaders planned how best to use their roles and opportunities to prevent and respond to VAWG. They were each equipped with a set of FAMA picture cards, a copy of the Faith Leader Toolkit and a Referral Booklet listing services for survivors.



FAMA Dialogues

F: Facts

What do you see in the picture?

.....

A: Association

What experiences have you had or seen which relate to it?

.....

M: Meaning

What does this mean for you and your community?

.....

A: Action

What could you and others do differently?



1,858

trained FAMA facilitators

864

faith leaders

.....

322

youth leaders

.....

672

women Savings & Loan Group leaders and members

“When I went through the Faith Leader Toolkit training, [it] helped me to stand my ground and help my community to be free of violence towards women and girls.”

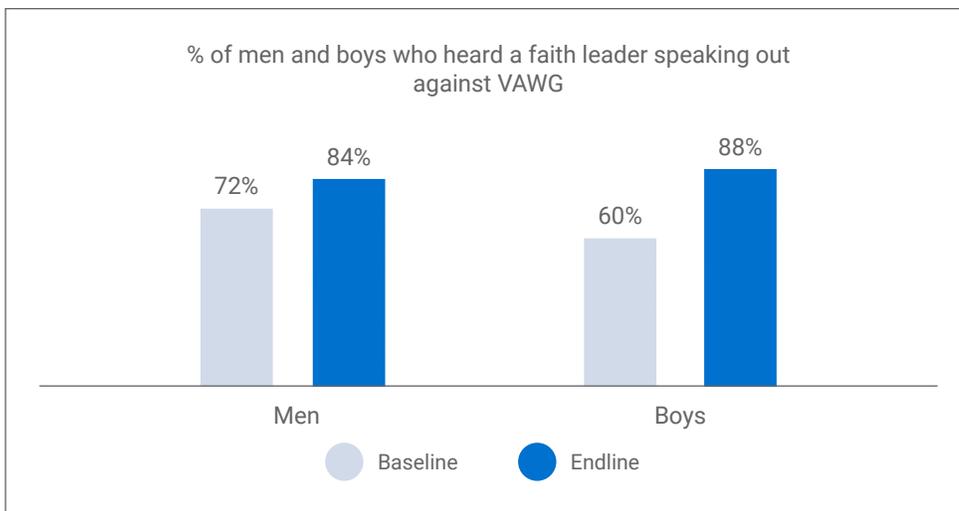
Female Faith Leader,
Grand Cape Mount



Women faith leader working with FAMA cards.

The evaluation found faith leaders put into practice the SBCC strategies they learned, becoming effective activists in their congregations and communities through sermons, scripture studies, counseling, FAMA dialogues and speaking out at community events, such as the annual 16 Days of Activism.¹⁵ Some noted that their work on raising awareness was more than simply sharing information, emphasizing that active discussion was key to people understanding what and why they needed change in their own lives. In the year after training, 65% of faith leaders reported that they spoke out often. Four years later, 50% or more reported they were still speaking out often. Regardless of frequency, the evaluation found their words and actions were recognized in the community.

Figure 3: More men and boys heard faith leaders speaking out against VAWG



Faith Leader GBV Toolkit Topics

- Gender roles
- Female-male power dynamics
- Domestic violence
- IPV and NPSV
- Religious text interpretations
- Actions to prevent violence
- Ways to support survivors

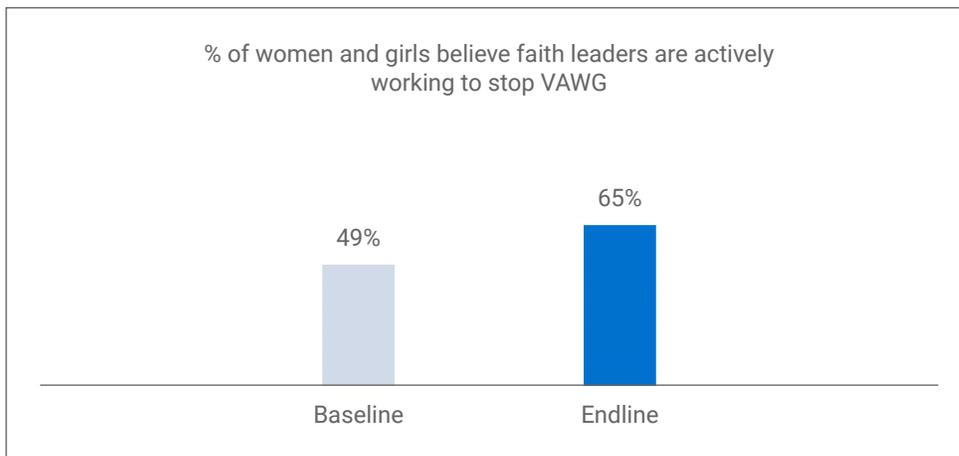
“In Liberia, boys are taught not to show their emotions. No wonder violence is so present in our lives. During the trainings, I realized that I can be a better husband to my wife, father to my children and better leader to my community.”

Male Faith Leader,
Grand Gedeh



Youth leaders walk through the community during a 16 Days of Activism activity.

Figure 4: More women and girls believe faith leaders are actively working to stop VAWG



The program fostered interfaith collaboration among local Christian and Muslim faith leaders, starting with the five-day Faith Leader training workshop together. The interfaith dynamic helped participating leaders to adopt a unified voice in speaking out against VAWG in their communities, amplifying the impact and strengthening social cohesion.

2.1.3 Youth Leaders as Agents of Change

With nearly two-thirds of Liberia’s population under the age of 25,¹⁶ ensuring youth’s commitment to violence-free and gender-equitable ways of life can make a huge difference in the long term. The program mobilized and equipped two types of youth leaders: youth faith leaders and student leaders. In addition to FAMA facilitation, youth leaders used a variety of creative media such as radio shows and drama skits to engage their peers, raising awareness of VAWG and promoting positive relationships, peaceful conflict resolution and support for survivors. Young people’s creativity, drive and ability to form trusting relationships with their peers contributed to preventing or mitigating harmful attitudes and behaviors in children and adolescents.

864
faith leaders trained in using the Faith Leader Toolkit



92

women



772

men



18,169

congregants heard VAWG SBC communication from faith leaders



113

women’s faith groups engaged in FAMA dialogues



226

radio shows on VAWG topics by adult faith leaders

“What really worked well is to have the two religions—Christian and Muslim—train and work together to spread awareness so other communities can follow.”

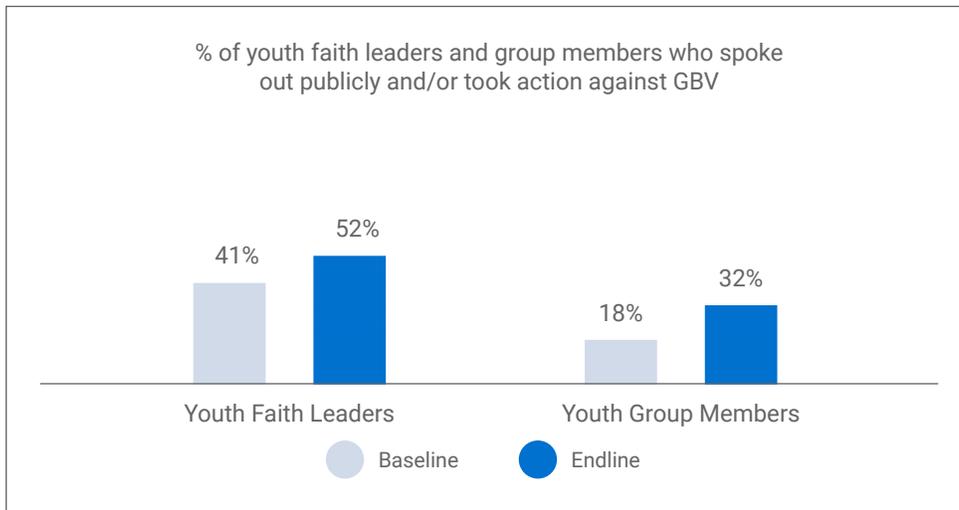
Male Faith Leader,
Grand Cape Mount



Youth acting in an SBC drama skit.

Liberia has very active Christian and Muslim youth movements. The Christian and Muslim youth leaders' training and engagement resulted in not just their own increased activism but also the group members, illustrating the organic growth of EVAWG champions.

Figure 5: Youth faith leaders and group members increasingly spoke out against VAWG and took action



Student leaders worked with peers, staff and parents in their schools. To foster long-term systemic change within schools, the program trained student leaders to advocate for active enforcement of the National Code of Conduct for School Administrators and Teachers (CoC). The Code bans sexual exploitation of students, including the practice of demanding sex for good grades. At the national level, the program succeeded in getting the Ministry of Education to create a new CoC enforcement unit to ensure greater accountability within schools.

At the local level, student leaders educated their school communities on the CoC and the process for addressing violations. They worked with staff and parents to form school-based GBV Committees to promote safety, prevention and responsiveness to misconduct. The evaluation reported a reduction in 'sex for grades' perpetrated by teachers, with some participants citing the FAMA picture card depicting inappropriate teacher conduct as making a difference.

1,753

youth faith leaders and group members, student and school leaders participated

47

radio shows on GBV issues led by youth faith leaders

61

schools with active GBV Committees



Student leaders conducted:

536

school-based drama and other EVAWG activities

20,637

students

"As a new Coalition member... I was encouraged that it is important to live a life that will bring pride to your name...I'm grateful to ECLRD because, when I was in school, I was able to talk to other young people about VAWG."

Youth Coalition Member,
Grand Gedeh



Women in Savings & Loan Groups.

2.1.4 Women's Economic Empowerment

The formation of member-run, women's Savings & Loan Groups supported women's economic empowerment, as they use their savings to revolve as microcredit. The groups also provided a dynamic channel for addressing VAWG issues, as well as COVID-19 prevention and response, during their meetings and in home visits.¹⁷ This deeper engagement with women followed a recommendation from the program's Phase One evaluation, which found that women's attitudes had not improved as much as men's had. While the evaluation did not assess the financial benefits quantitatively, participants shared some of the benefits they experienced; for instance, starting small business activities or buying a home.

Findings documented that the groups' work contributed to the program's goals, such that group members who participated in FAMA dialogues were found to have higher level of anti-violence attitudes compared with those who had not. Members also took action directly to support survivors.

However, women's participation in economic activities was also found to increase the risk of conflict with their husbands/male partners in situations; for example, where men felt disenfranchised from their perceived role as provider or did not believe women should have control over their own money. This aligns with findings globally¹⁸ and represents an area of further contextual understanding for Liberia. It is also possible that women's experience of violence preceded their participation since the program prioritized survivors for inclusion in the Savings & Loan Groups.



116

Women's Savings & Loan Groups



951

families had home visits with FAMA dialogues

"There is a women's group which organized itself as a result of the training. [They] check on each other in the community and if, for example, a neighbor was beaten by her husband, the group will intervene."

Male Participant, Bong



County-level Faith Leader Training.

2.2 Impact | Progress Toward Program Goals

There is strong evidence from both quantitative and qualitative data that the program contributed to reducing VAWG. The evaluation shows significant associations between the reduction in violence and exposure to the program’s faith-based activities. The program demonstrated progress toward achieving its two goals, with a range of positive impacts documented.

2.2.1 Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls



Goal 1: Women and girls experience less intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence.

The evaluation assessed this goal by measuring change in three dimensions:

- The self-reported experience of violence from survivors’ and perpetrators’ perspectives
- Attitudes about gender equality and violence against women and girls
- Gender-equitable behaviors and women’s empowerment

“In our community, men used to beat on their wife or spouse, but with the help of ECLRD it is not happening again. The town chief also put law down that no man should beat their wife in the town.”

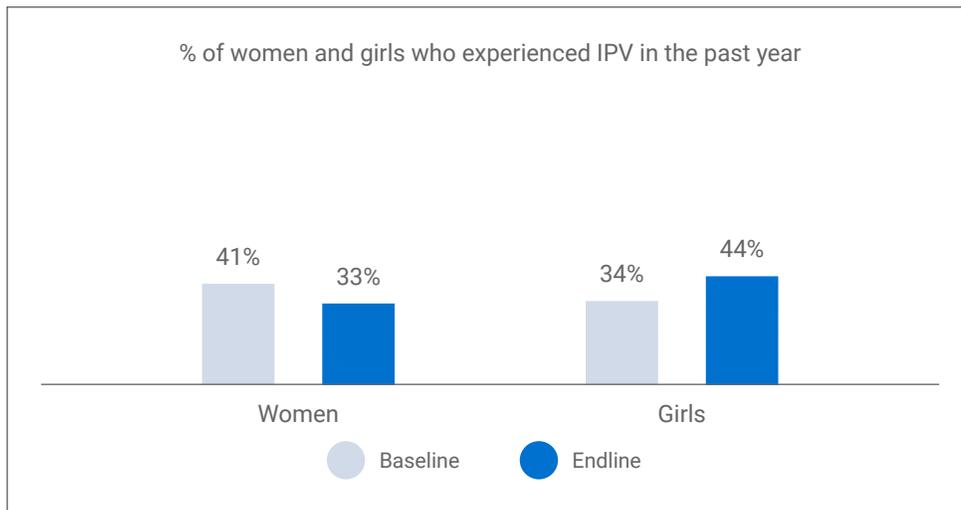
Female Congregant, Bong

Reducing the Experience of Violence: IPV and NPSV

The program was effective in reducing women’s experience of IPV and NPSV, with some significant associations between this reduction in violence and participation in various program activities. A corresponding decrease in men’s self-reported perpetration of violence was not observed. However, this may be linked to men’s social desirability bias at baseline, county-level variations and whether they participated in program activities.

Quantitative and qualitative data provided strong documentation that the program contributed to reducing IPV against women. There was a corresponding decrease in adolescent male IPV perpetration, with adult male IPV perpetration reduced in three of four counties. However, IPV was found to have increased for adolescent girls, specifically emotional and physical IPV while sexual IPV stayed the same. Part of the difference in results for women and girls may be due to the smaller sample size of adolescent girls.

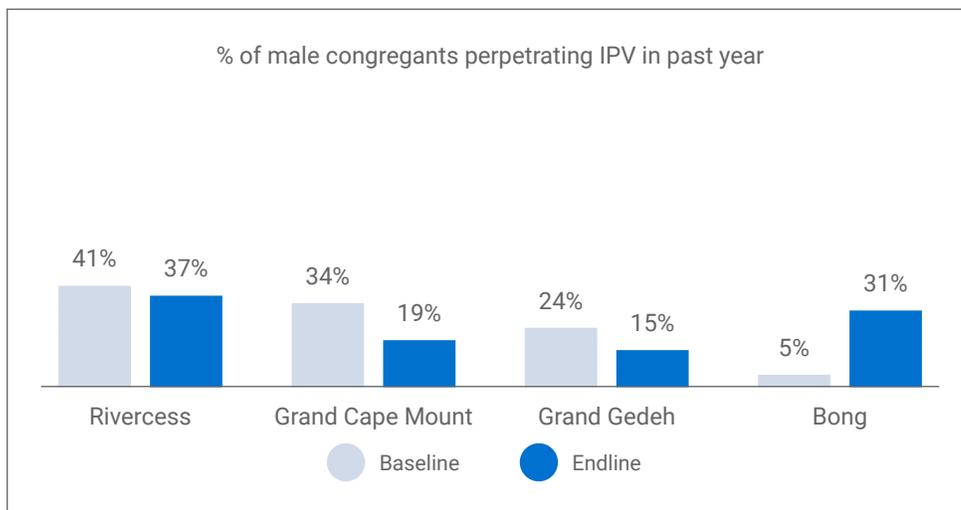
Figure 6: Intimate partner violence decreased for women, but not for girls



“Before then the men used to beat on their wives, but from this awareness we have carried out, soon people learned that is it not good to harm your wife.”

Male Faith Leader, Rivercess

Figure 7: Male congregants’ perpetrating IPV decreased in 3 of 4 counties

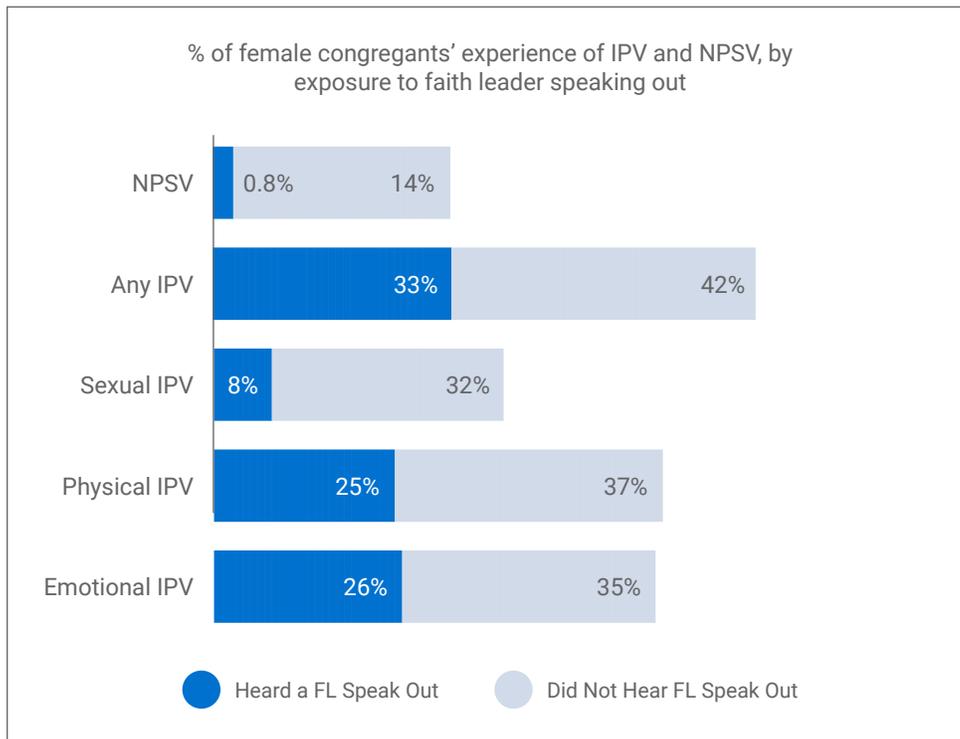


The results on NPSV differed from IPV. Women’s experience increased slightly and girls stayed the same; men and boys’ NPSV perpetration stayed the same. Again, there were some variations by county. On the qualitative side, participants recounted cases where men changed their behavior, with fewer husbands abusing their wives. Further, some systemic actions were taken reflecting social norm change through engagement with traditional leaders. For example, one local chief enacted a law prohibiting men from assaulting their wives.

The data analysis demonstrated connections between program activities and progress toward the goals. The prevalence of all forms of IPV

and NPSV was significantly lower among female congregants who participated in the program's faith-based activities with VAWG discussed (e.g., marriage preparation, retreats, counseling, community dialogues) compared with those who did not. Survey data found significant associations between hearing faith leaders speak out against VAWG in the past year and lower prevalence of physical and sexual IPV and NPSV.

Figure 8: Women and girl congregants who heard faith leaders speaking out against VAWG experienced less violence than those who did not



Many participants attributed the reduction of IPV to ECLRD's and faith leaders' engaging community members in dialogue and using FAMA cards. Congregants in focus group discussions described leaders and members in churches and mosques speaking out on VAWG during sermons, Bible studies and youth meetings.

Program activities and processes were credited by participants with making a difference in reducing incidences of rape. The most significant progress was made in raising awareness of the unacceptability of rape, reducing stigma against survivors and strengthening GBV response measures. The program supported women and girls' access to justice, such as reporting to the police and how the legal system addresses VAWG.

In addition, two-thirds of program leaders and congregants reported that early and forced marriage had decreased. This involved not just changing attitudes but taking direct action. Adolescent male congregants shared they now report the problem to the town chief if a man is trying to marry an underage girl, and the chief will intervene. While not a specific target of the program, participants shared examples reflecting a reduction in economic violence. For example, some men changed harmful behaviors such as spending money on alcohol and buying expensive clothes while their families struggled to eat and make ends meet.

"To succeed, you have to carry on awareness... Go into the communities, talking to people, making them understand, to know what they are doing (perpetrating violence) is not right."

Female Youth Leader, Bong

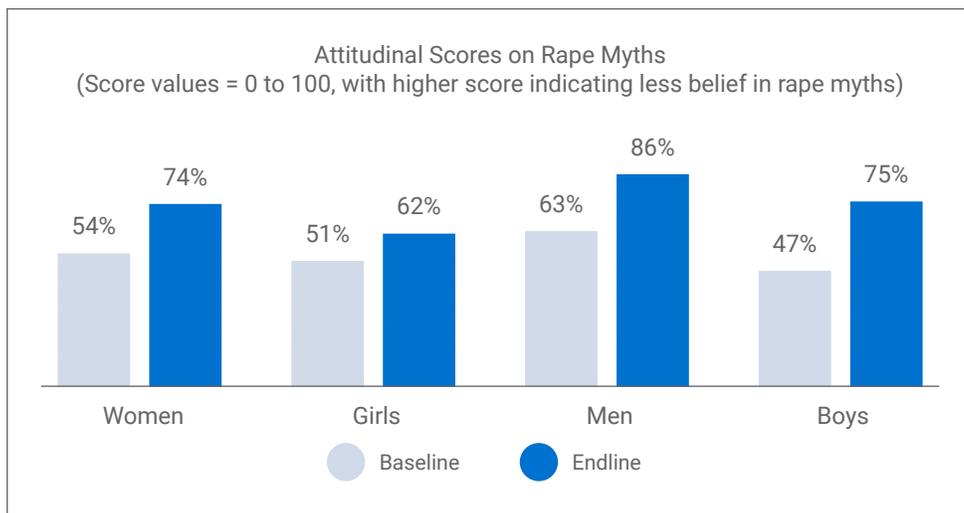
"Before then, when ECLRD was not in Rivercess County, these thing happen on a daily basis, women don't have rights. But after attending a series of workshops and trainings, we (women participants and faith leaders) went back to our communities and we carried out messages to our towns/communities."

Male Faith Leader, Rivercess

Increasing Anti-VAWG and Gender-Equitable Attitudes

The evaluation analyzed attitudes towards VAWG and gender equality according to specific domains.¹⁹ The program was successful in improving both gender-equitable and anti-violence attitudes in congregant groups. Attitudes opposing the justification of physical and sexual violence were already commonly held when the program started; however, these still increased by the endline. Other attitudes, such as those not tolerating VAWG and rejecting rape myths, improved substantially for all congregants. On rejecting rape myths, there were large improvements across all gender and ages, with men and boys scoring highest on debunking these myths.

Figure 9: Attitudes Rejecting Rape Myths Improved



Gender-Equitable Behaviors and Women’s Empowerment

The results indicate there have been some significant program impacts on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Research suggests that these impacts have the potential to both amplify and diminish the risk of abuse. There were multiple reports of women and girls assuming greater participation in leadership roles, with some men supporting women by doing more domestic labor and other activities traditionally considered women’s work. Some women and girls shared their realization that a woman’s role is not only to take care of the children and home. In addition to documented individual behavior change, there were clear indications of social change. Overall, women were found to demonstrate leadership in their communities, schools and Savings & Loan Groups.

The quantitative data also provides support for increased gender equality and women’s empowerment. Both men and adolescent boys with wives/female partners increased the frequency in which they asked their partner’s opinion and how often they helped around the house, including with cooking. Younger men showed even more change at all frequencies – once, a few times and many times. The percentage of young men reporting ‘many times’ rose from about 2% to about 35%.



Attitudes Measured toward VAWG

Gender equality

Physical violence

Sexual violence

Rape myths

Tolerance for VAWG

“Before men used to beat on their wives. From this awareness we carried out, people know that it is not good to harm your wife, because [married] people are no longer two but one.”

Male Faith Leader, Rivercess

“In the past, people would mock a man doing what they thought was women’s work, but now... the dynamics on gender have changed.”

Male Participant, Rivercess



Program staff providing VAWG support and referral services.

2.2.2 Increased Access to VAWG Support and Services for Survivors



Goal 2: Women and girl survivors of violence have increased support and access to VAWG services.

This goal was assessed through two dimensions:

- Knowledge of VAWG services, including specific support and services available through faith leaders
- Women and girl survivors receiving referrals and other support from faith leaders and communities

Overall, the evaluation found that program faith leaders, their churches and mosques increased direct support for survivors of violence and their access to services. This entailed reducing stigma, increasing awareness of services and legal rights and providing assistance in overcoming practical access barriers such as transportation.

Knowledge of VAWG Services

The program prepared a Referral Booklet with a comprehensive listing of VAWG services for faith leaders and others to use. Despite temporary lockdowns and movement restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, faith leaders reported sharing information on the services with 7,421 congregation and community members. Overall, women and girls' knowledge of VAWG services significantly improved as a result of the program, especially among congregants who heard faith leaders speak out against VAWG. For example, 91% of women and girl congregants who heard faith leaders speak out about VAWG experienced significantly improved knowledge of VAWG services, compared with 48% of those who did not.



35

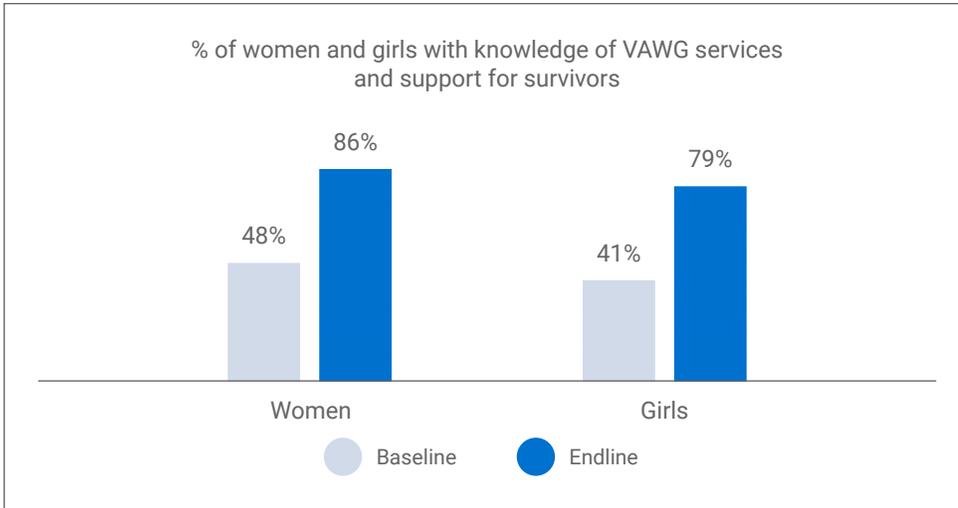
survivors received support and accompaniment by faith leaders



225

survivors provided with Dignity Kits

Figure 10: More women and girls know about services and support available to survivors

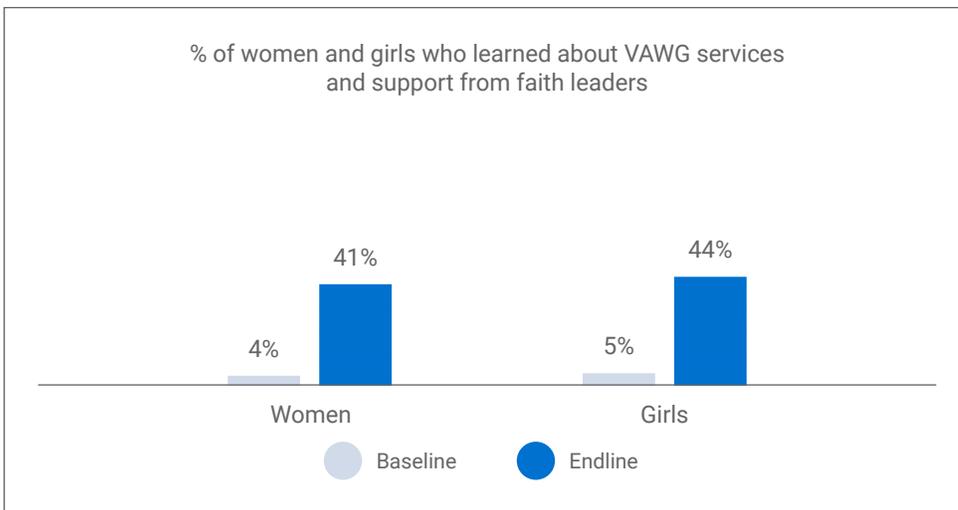


105
survivors provided with temporary shelter

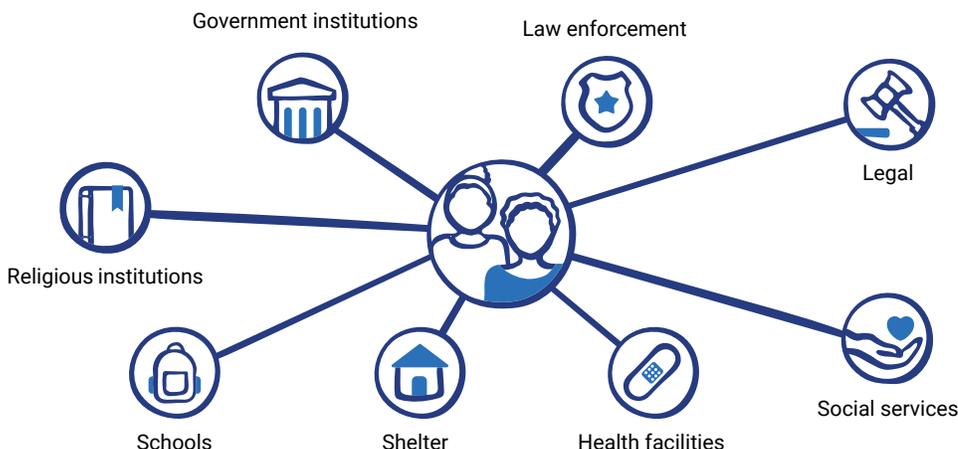


108
adolescent survivors provided with school support

Figure 11: Dramatic increase in women and girls who learned about VAWG services from faith leaders



The increase in knowledge was significant for all types of services, including social services, legal advice, shelters and services provided by schools.

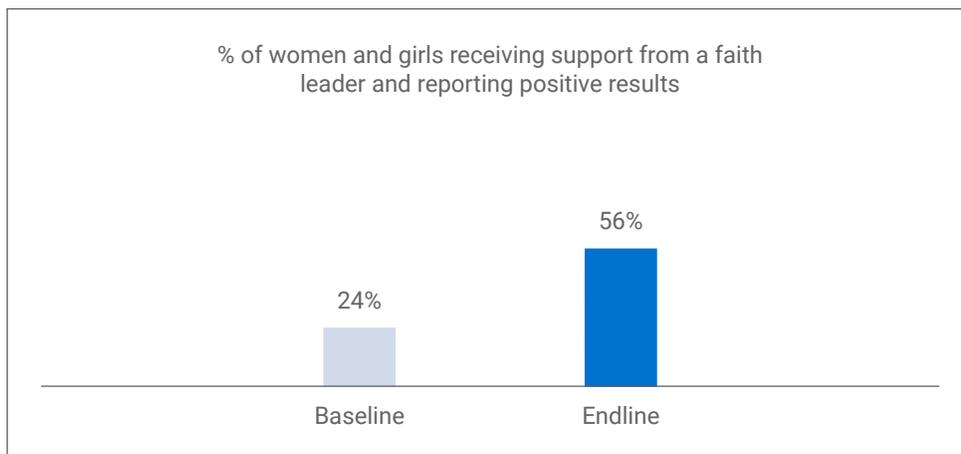


Referrals and Support from Faith Leaders and Communities

The program mobilized the full range of available service providers and coordinated with them through the county GBV Task Forces, which representatives from the program's county interfaith and youth coalitions serve. During the program period, a new monitoring system was set up for GBV services. In the year following, it showed 246 cases had been referred by the program's trained faith leaders.

Female congregants' knowledge of the services that faith leaders provide also increased, along with their satisfaction of these services.

Figure 12: More women and girls received support from faith leader and reported positive results



A key component of faith leader activities related to direct intervention. For example, in circumstances when a child was raped, a woman beaten or a pregnant daughter rejected, trained faith leaders increasingly intervened on behalf of the victim. In cases of rape, this was to ensure that the victim received necessary treatment, the matter was reported to the police and family members did not settle for informal, monetary compensation by the perpetrator. Within households, trained faith leaders confronted perpetrators of domestic violence and child neglect, engaging them in discussions on the moral implications of their actions and alternative ways of addressing conflict. The evaluation documented numerous cases of program participants taking actions to support survivors.

"Two years ago (there was a man) in my community... He didn't want to support his children... He was beating his wife... I called the other faith leaders and we talked to him... Now, any time there is a meeting he is the first to come."

Female Faith Leader,
Rivercess

2.3 Program Sustainability

From the outset, the Liberia program was rooted in empowering local leadership, creating and developing networks and structural connections to build community ownership and government accountability for long-term, sustainable impact.

The evaluation identified strong signs of sustainability including:

Effectiveness	Impact
EVAWG activism increased due to program implementation.	Overall increased awareness of and resistance to VAWG.
FAMA card dialogues leading to changes.	Increased reporting of VAWG, especially rape.
Increase in community spaces that discuss VAWG.	Increased community systems that address VAWG.

At the program implementation level, program participants had strong requests for ECLRD to continue and expand the program to the many other communities that need to reduce VAWG. They cited the need for long-term community engagement as well as the challenges of volunteerism without small transportation stipends the program provided. Nevertheless, they specifically expressed confidence that the program results would be sustained for three primary reasons:

- 1 Changes occurred in people's awareness, attitudes and behaviors**, with participants modeling new ways of thinking and being within family and community settings.
- 2 Faith and youth leaders, congregants and other individuals mobilized as activists** by the program stated they will continue teaching and spreading what they learned.
- 3 Systemic measures have been put in place** to ensure sustained change, e.g., through stricter enforcement of the Code of Conduct in schools, community policing structures and customary laws that fine VAWG perpetrators.

The program instilled hope and a renewed sense of possibility among those who championed its efforts. According to the evaluation, both leaders and participants found the program to be highly relevant and believe strongly that its benefits should be expanded to other communities seeking effective approaches for preventing and responding to VAWG.

"In Solo Town, a 10-year-old child was raped by her uncle. I contacted the family and encouraged them to report the case. The uncle is now in prison and others can see that rape is punishable. The survivor was also referred for treatment."

Savings & Loan Group
Secretary,
Grand Gedeh



Muslim and Christian faith leaders at an event for the EVAWG Program in Liberia.

“We are one. We are united now: the Muslim and the Christian, the imam and the pastor. We can invite all the people and educate them on what to do and what not to do, so they can follow us.”

Adolescent Male Congregant,
Grand Cape Mount

3

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

Recommendations

The evaluation recommended the following four best practices for Liberian program continuation and replication by other programs in areas grappling with high rates of VAWG:

1 Mobilizing faith leaders

Such leaders, both adults and youth, of all religions and denominations, served as effective change agents, who exercised their unique reach and moral authority to influence social norms and behaviors within their communities, congregants’ homes and schools.

3 Multisector engagement

From the start, the program engaged diverse sectors of society—national and local government representatives, faith leaders, the police, school authorities, healthcare providers and others—in a broad consultative process to leverage their knowledge and facilitate collaboration. Such engagement was essential to achieving the program’s goals and laying the foundation for broader systemic changes.

2 Use of FAMA dialogues with picture cards

The illustrated cards made possible a reflection-learning-action process that engaged participants—including students, congregants and women’s savings group members—in dialogue and change around issues related to VAWG, gender equality and healthy relationships. The cards proved especially useful given low levels of education in targeted rural communities.

4 Interfaith collaboration

Where appropriate, the interfaith approach can strengthen social and behavior change impact, increase social cohesion and contribute to local ownership and sustainability.

The evaluation offered recommendations for strengthening the Liberian program and similar ones. There is a need for more specific social and behavior change communication to strengthen the promotion of gender equitable attitudes and practices, as distinct from attitudes toward VAWG. With traditional beliefs such as rape myths often driving VAWG, more attention should be placed on identifying and debunking these beliefs. To address

this, the report suggested including messages on the back of FAMA cards related to harmful beliefs and adding sequencing guidelines for volunteers to use in facilitating FAMA dialogues. Lastly, more emphasis should be placed on mitigating the risk of women's Savings & Loan Group members experiencing increased VAWG from their husbands/ male partners.²⁰

Lessons Learned

Through the program implementation and evaluation, Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD identified several key learnings applicable to future work in Liberia and other similar EVAWG programs in other countries. These include:

1 Greater involvement of women faith leaders and other types of women leaders

Such women proved critical players in preventing and responding to VAWG. When there are fewer women clergy and lay leaders in a local area more effort is needed to identify and engage women faith leaders and other leaders such as women Savings & Loan Group leaders.

3 Increased emphasis on experiential learning

For attitude and behavior change to be successful and sustainable, it must be an iterative process of self-discovery. A learning model that integrates experiential activities and facilitation strategies is crucial to this. Examples from the program include the five-day training with faith leaders and the facilitation of FAMA dialogues with a range of groups and families in the community.

2 Expanded youth faith and student leader engagement

With their energy, passion and unique ability to connect to their peers, youth are effective change agents, whose efforts could be further leveraged through faith networks, school-based activities and community mobilization.

4 Flexible programming

As reflected in the program's COVID-19 experience, it is important to build flexibility into the project design. This is true not only for adjusting and adapting to crises (e.g., pandemics, conflicts, climate emergencies) in real-time, but also in considering the implications of such crises for women and girls over the long term.



Women's savings focus group discussing GBV.

4

Building on Progress

In 2023, Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD are disseminating evaluation results in VAWG/GBV fora and high-level learning platforms to elicit critical feedback and analysis from peer organizations and GBV stakeholders. They will strengthen the Liberia EVAWG program based on the evaluation's recommendations and subsequent peer learning. Priority will be given to areas where more change is needed, including reduction of violence against adolescent girls. Enhancing the program's long-term sustainability will also be reinforced by transitioning ownership to local communities and their leaders.

Episcopal Relief & Development will further explore applicable GBV strategies and resources to increase the impact of integrated relief and development programs in other countries. This involves testing and adapting the VAWG Prevention and Response Faith Leader Toolkit and FAMA cards with diverse groups of people. As it works on program enhancements, the organization will focus on scaling the reach and impact of these effective VAWG prevention and response strategies.

While the need for change is great, so too is the opportunity to catalyze faith and youth leaders as agents of change in community-led social and behavior. Through these initiatives to prevent VAWG and strengthen response for survivors, women and girls can live free from violence in communities wherein they are treated with dignity and respect.

"We need the project more than ever before... There were places that we didn't cover. We need to go to those districts that we didn't cover, and let them feel the impact of the project like other communities did."

Program Staff, Rivercess

Appendix A: Acronyms

CoC	National Code of Conduct for School Administrators and Teachers
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
ECLRD	Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief and Development
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
FAMA	Facts, Association, Meaning, Action
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IRUSA	Islamic Relief USA
NPSV	Non-partner Sexual Violence
SBC	Social and Behavior Change
SBC	Social and Behavior Change Communication
UN Trust Fund	UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

Appendix B: Figures

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Figure 4	More women and girls believe faith leaders are actively working to stop VAWG	Page 9
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Figure 6	Intimate partner violence decreased for women, but not for girls	Page 13
Figure 7	Women and girl congregants who heard faith leaders speaking out against VAWG experienced less violence than those who did not	Page 13
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Endnotes

- 1 The highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world are reported in sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia and Oceania. Within sub-Saharan Africa, the highest prevalence of violence is against girls and young women. More information here: <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>
- 2 The Liberia EVAWG Program was initially launched as a three-year project with a grant from UN Women's United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls for 2015-2017 and from Islamic Relief USA for 2016-2018. Due to the significant progress demonstrated by the 2017 external evaluation, both the UN Trust Fund and Islamic Relief USA awarded follow-on grants through December 2022 and March 2023, respectively. In addition, the UN Trust Fund, with funding from the European Union, awarded a two-year Spotlight Initiative grant with a primary focus on strengthening the program's COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery efforts. The program is also supported by other donors of Episcopal Relief & Development.
- 3 Liberia EVAWG Program Evaluation Report 2017, "Engaging Faith-Based Organizations to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls and Increase Survivors' Access to Services in Liberia 2015-2017", Dr. Seema Vyas, Mattias Zingel and Joseph Nyan, 2018, <https://unf.unwomen.org/en/learning-hub/evaluations/2018/02/final-evaluation-engaging-faithbased-organizations-to-prevent-violence-against-women-girls>.
- 4 Intimate partner violence is defined by the World Health Organization as behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors. This definition covers violence by both current and former spouses and partners. Controlling behavior would include financial or economic violence, such as a husband confiscating a loan from his wife who is in a Savings & Loan Group. The evaluation measured three forms of intimate partner violence quantitatively: emotional, physical and sexual.
- 5 Qualitative Research Report, "The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls in Liberia", JAC Consultancy, 2022, <https://www.episcopalrelief.org/resource/the-gendered-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-and-girls-in-liberia/>. Funded by the UN Trust Fund and European Union's Spotlight Initiative.
- 6 The program's SBC strategies are based on behavior science. Sources include the BEHAVE Framework created by the Academy of Education Development and further developed by the Core Group, see [Applying the BEHAVE Framework](#). The social-ecological model of sustainable social and behavior change was originally developed in the field of public health. It reflects five levels of interrelationships and influences: individuals, interpersonal, organizations, community and society/public policy.
- 7 Episcopal Relief & Development's member-run Savings & Loan Group model involves "savings with education". This means that once members complete their start-up phase and are functioning groups, they can select from a variety of education modules including health, GBV and other issues relevant to their lives.
- 8 The experiential learning process is a cycle of reflecting on one's own experience, critically analyzing it and then experimenting with new ideas or ways of acting, followed by reflection on the new experience.
- 9 The evaluation confirmed that the theory of change held at the community, district and county levels – the primary focus of the program. The evaluation was not able to adequately assess the national level results with the data gathered.

- 10 Some results varied substantially across the four program implementation counties. In certain cases, there appeared to be partial explanations, such as the linkage between attitudes tolerating violence and IPV. In other cases, it may be due to two counties being much more remote and thus facing more challenges such as accessing services. There were some instances where evaluators could not identify clear trends to explain why more negative findings were observed in some counties for certain indicators. ECLRD and local program leaders are following up on a county basis where needed to address areas that require more attention.
- 11 Comprehensive Endline Evaluation for the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Program, “Scaling Up Faith Leaders’ Engagement to Prevent and Respond to VAWG”, Dr. Elisabet le Roux and Dr. Julienne Corboz, February 2023, <https://www.episcopalrelief.org/resource/comprehensive-endline-evaluation-for-liberias-violence-against-women-and-girls-vawg-program/>.
- 12 Episcopal Relief & Development’s FAMA methodology was adapted from interweavesolutions.org and ProLiteracy’s [Literacy for Social Change](#) approach. It also has similarities to the [ORID Facilitation Framework](#). FAMA is used in different sector programs such as early childhood development, water-sanitation-hygiene, nutrition, climate resilience and trauma recovery with Episcopal Relief & Development’s partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Below is an example of the facilitator’s side of a GBV FAMA picture card:

FACTS

To help people reflect on and discuss what they have just seen.

- What do you see in the picture?
- What is happening?
- Is there violence?
- What kind of violence?
- Can you tell a story of what you think is going on?

ASSOCIATION

To help people connect the experience in the picture to their own feelings and their own lives.

- Have you ever seen or experienced anything like this before?
- Can you share an example from your own life or community?

MEANING

To help people identify and discuss the deeper meaning of the experience, the lessons to be learned, the story’s importance to them, to others, and their community in general.

- How does the story of this picture and your own experiences make you feel?
- How often does something like this happen?
- What do you think happens to the man and woman in this picture?
- What effect does it have on you, or others in the community?
- What can we learn from this story and/or from your own story?

ACTION

To incite people to take action.

- What would you do to change this situation?
- Would you act alone or with others?
- What can you do with others?
- How?
- Why?
- Beginning when?

- 13 According to the 2008 National Population and Housing Census, which remains the most recent available, the population is 85.6 percent Christian, 12.2 percent Muslim. U.S. State Department “2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Liberia” <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/liberia/>.
- 14 *The Gender-Based Violence Prevention & Response Toolkit: A Facilitation Guide for Faith Leaders in Liberia* was co-created with the program’s interfaith National Faith Leaders Advisory Coalition during the first phase. In the 2018-2022 phase, the toolkit was expanded to include content on trauma awareness and resilience, preventing and responding to violence against children and a theological framework for gender equality.

- 15 The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign from November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, until December 10, Human Rights Day. The campaign is coordinated by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership.
- 16 Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook: Liberia,” May 9, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/liberia/>.
- 17 Episcopal Relief & Development programs have demonstrated that Savings & Loan Groups serve as powerful, trusted spaces for learning and behavior change in disaster response situations, exemplified by its partnership with ECLRD in Liberia during the Ebola crisis.
- 18 For example, see two key studies by USAID “Village Savings and Loan Associations and Intimate Partner Violence” https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WQ3P.pdf and “Savings Group Plus: A Review of the Evidence” https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00W5V7.pdf.
- 19 The evidence has been evolving on the classical causation framework of Knowledge-Attitude-Behavior/ Practice (KAB/KABP). For more information, see “Health Promotion and the Knowledge-attitude-behavior Continuum”. Preventative Medicine, Erwin P. Bettinghaus, 2001. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0091-7435\(86\)90025-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0091-7435(86)90025-3).

Causal links between attitudes and practices in some of the program data show weak and ambivalent links around KABP. This program evaluation has elevated correlations but is not able to provide evidence on causation. Current behavior science theory demonstrates attitudes should change while barriers to behavior change need to be addressed, which is reflected in the program design.

- 20 This is a global problem not unique to Liberia. Peer organizations have produced reports and resources with proven practices to address this issue, which Episcopal Relief & Development and ECLRD plan to pilot in the Liberia program.



Cover photo: Muslim and Christian faith leaders at an Interfaith VAWG Training.
Photos courtesy of ECLRD and Episcopal Relief & Development

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