

It's Our Time: Applying Proven Approaches for Faith-Based Change in the US

"The Proverbs 31 woman is a star not because of what she does but how she does it — with valor. So do your thing. If it's refurbishing old furniture — do it with valor. If it's keeping up with your two-year-old — do it with valor. If it's fighting against human trafficking . . . leading a company . . . or getting other people to do your work for you — do it with valor. Take risks. Work hard. Make mistakes. Get up the next morning. And surround yourself with people who will cheer you on."

— Rachel Held Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*

Episcopal Relief & Development is the compassionate response of The Episcopal Church to human suffering in the world. Hearing God's call to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to respect the dignity of every human being, Episcopal Relief & Development serves to bring together the generosity of Episcopalians and others with the needs of the world.

The statistics on the status of women and girls around the world can be overwhelming. Episcopal Relief & Development is making a difference, creating proven, lasting changes in communities near and far. We invest in expertise-inspired programs as a priority, co-creating long-term, highly scalable initiatives based on differentiated capabilities. Here is a summary of the research driven impact in each of our goal areas and how we are making a difference:

Promoting Women's Rights and Empowerment

Our training and education programs demonstrate increased food security, a reduction in poverty levels, increased self-confidence and social capital and increased knowledge and practice in health, business and/or money management. We also help pinpoint and illuminate social norms that create unsafe environments for women and children and alleviate some of the factors that can lead to abuse and resentment, like poverty and hunger.

Creating Economic Stability

Our Savings with Education (SwE) program supports the creation of locally led, partner-facilitated savings and loan groups that provide participants with financial training and small, low-interest loans. Participants use the loans in a variety of ways, such as starting or growing a small business, paying for school fees and covering emergency expenses, which promotes empowerment and equity in their families.

Cultivating Women Leaders

Trusted in the communities we serve, we train local faith leaders to change harmful mindsets and behaviors in their congregations, families, communities and beyond. They learn to model and promote

human dignity, community well-being and inclusive perspectives that honor diverse experiences. We foster learning platforms for collaboration, peer engagement, dialogue and learning.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

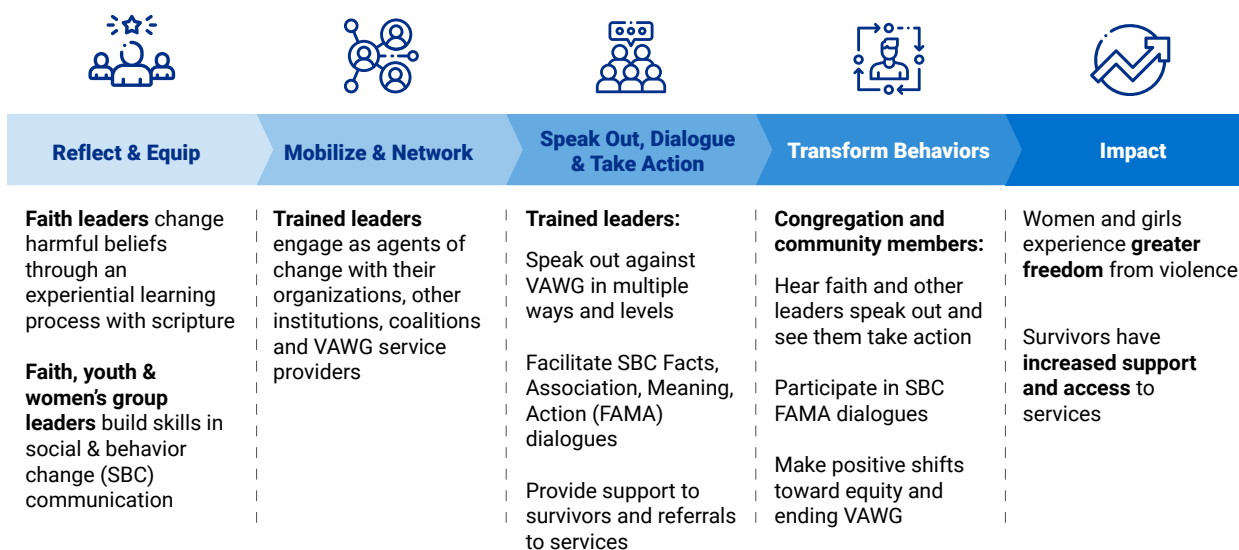
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is pervasive globally. Working in partnership with the Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief & Development, our programs have measurably decreased intimate partner violence and adolescent boys’ perpetration and improved respectful relationship values for men, women, adolescent boys and girls. We have also increased the knowledge of resources and services for survivors of violence against women. VAWG is a key barrier to achieving equality, women’s empowerment and even food security. Investing in whole community healing methods and eliminating VAW is vital to human thriving.

Ways of Working

We use behavior change science to support these leaders in reflecting on themselves and their faith and belief systems, engaging any cognitive dissonance they see with reality and making choices to speak out and improve support services for survivors. We invest in improved access to services and economic and financial inclusion for specific populations.

In Liberia, we successfully mobilized and equipped faith leaders and youth with social and behavior change strategies and tailored tools. Despite some resistance, we succeeded in reducing violence against women and girls and expanded survivors’ support in their communities.

Below is a graph of the program theory of change that explains how and why the program activities lead to the changes we want to see:



VAWG – Violence Against Women & Girls; FAMA – Fact, Association, Meaning and Action. (There are sample FAMA cards in this toolkit in the [Formation](#) section)

A Challenge in the US

Misdirected shame keeps the victims mostly invisible to faith communities, which can adopt the position that they are somehow exempt from the epidemic. But statistics in the US on violence against women prove otherwise:

Nearly 1 in 2 women in the United States will face physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives.



Almost 1 in 5 women in the United States report any contact sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.



Slightly more than 2 in 5 women in the United States reported experiencing any physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.



1 in 4 men in the United States has endured severe physical violence from an intimate partner.



Right now, women are being denied equality and safety and men are creating situations that are insecure and even violent in our pews and our neighborhoods. Establishing safety and care requires intentional leadership trained on protection policies who understand trauma-informed care and know local resources for referrals. Faith leaders must continue to educate themselves on the causes and effects of intimate partner violence to teach about it from a theological lens.

There is growing evidence that appropriately engaging faith leaders, scripture and faith-based activities in social and behavior change interventions can reduce VAWG.

The [independent study](#) of our Ending Violence Against Women Liberia program corroborates this connection and determined significant associations between violence reduction and congregants' exposure to faith-based activities.

The study found that the prevalence of all forms of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence was significantly lower among female congregants who heard their faith leader speak out against violence (in sermons, marriage preparation, retreats, counseling and community dialogues) compared to those who had not.

Our work continues to support church leaders in being a voice in this important epidemic in their communities and to raise support for our efforts to transform the lives of women and girls. By using this toolkit you can join us in working together for lasting change.