

## Engaging Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Women and Girls in Liberia 2015-2017

This summary highlights key learnings and findings from an external evaluation of the Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief & Development's (ECL-RD) three-year Violence Against Women and Girls (VAW/G) Prevention and Response program in Liberia. The evaluation was conducted from October to November 2017 and the full report was published in March 2018. ECL-RD worked in collaboration with Episcopal Relief & Development and the program was supported by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Islamic Relief USA. The evaluation was conducted by Dr. Seema Vyas, Matthias Zingel and Joseph Nyan.

### Context

In 2015, twelve years after Liberia's fourteen-years of civil conflict ended, the country continued to suffer from weak infrastructure, poor health outcomes, low levels of education and widespread poverty. In 2016, 37% of the population lived on less than \$1.90 USD per day,<sup>1</sup> and Liberia ranked 177 out of 188 on the 2016 Human Development Index. Moreover, extreme violence and disintegration of family structures during Liberia's two civil wars have resulted in high rates and normalization of VAW/G. Women experience high levels of violence in the home due to gender inequity, which perpetuates men's dominance and control.

The Liberian government has addressed VAW/G through policies and laws, such as the Rape Amendment Act of 2006, the Domestic Violence Law of 2014 and the United Nation's Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Girls (CEDAW). Enforcement of policies,

**44%** OF ALL WOMEN AGES 15-49 HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL VIOLENCE SINCE THE AGE OF 15

**39%** OF WOMEN WHO HAVE EVER HAD A PARTNER REPORT EXPERIENCING PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE FROM A HUSBAND OR MALE PARTNER DURING THEIR LIFETIME

**36%** OF WOMEN WHO HAVE EVER HAD A PARTNER REPORT EXPERIENCING PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY A HUSBAND OR MALE PARTNER DURING THE PAST YEAR

Source: 2007 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey

<sup>1</sup> 2014 World Bank Poverty Data





## Program Strategy

- **Develop capacities of national and local-level religious groups and leaders** to speak out against VAW/G at church, mosque and religious and community events using scripture and other tools;
- **Facilitate process of faith leaders and other community change agents** to re-examine gender roles and power relationships in order to challenge assumptions and increase self-awareness about what contributes to VAW/G;
- **Engage youth leaders as facilitators** of peer dialogue and community mobilization on VAW/G using drama, radio and other advocacy methods in schools and public forums;
- **Partner with National and County GBV Task Forces** by participating in multi-sector support and referral systems that include community, district, county and national stakeholders.

## Faith Community in Liberia

Based on a population of 4.7 million

85.6% Christian

12.2% Muslim

1.4% No Religion

Other (less than 1%)

Source: 2008 National Census

especially in rural areas, is lacking due to inadequate personnel and other resources for local ministries, police, health centers and courts. In addition, laws are often undermined due to the practice of settling matters within the family or through traditional structures.

The foundational work of tackling the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate VAW/G does not take place in any sustained manner, and there is little or no opportunity to understand, reflect on or discuss how women are valued and treated. In settings like Liberia with limited infrastructure and resources dedicated to ending VAW/G, engaging with faith leaders as agents of change is an important avenue in efforts to end VAW/G.

## Program Intervention

The program was designed to prevent and respond to VAW/G by addressing beliefs, attitudes and behaviors related to women and girls' roles and rights. Ninety-eight percent of Liberia's population identify with a faith tradition. Faith leaders therefore can play powerful roles, both in preventing VAW/G and in facilitating more effective responses to incidents of violence. The program works with Christian and Muslim faith and youth leaders to prevent and respond to VAW/G in Grand Cape Mount and Rivercess Counties. Faith leaders speak out against VAW/G at all levels, from leading national dialogues to educating their congregations and local communities through sermons, counseling, interfaith radio discussion, and other religious events. Faith leaders and program staff are also supporting survivors where government or other structures are too weak or non-existent to deliver essential services, such as counseling, accompaniment to referral services and temporary shelter and care.

From 2015-2017 the program, in consultation with the Technical Working Group (TWG) of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, developed and tested the Faith Leader GBV Toolkit, an experience-based tool to train faith leaders in preventing and responding to VAW/G through their work. Using the Experiential Learning Model (ELM), the Toolkit trains faith leaders on VAW/G and their role in ending it. The Toolkit's 4-step learning process deconstructs participants' conceptions of gender and power through self-identification, reflection, analysis and action, allowing for the introspection needed to shift internalized attitudes and behaviors around gender inequity. Participants are guided to re-examine and re-purpose sacred texts from the Bible and the Qur'an that carry more equitable messaging, and emphasize respect, responsibility and dignity. The training builds trust and relationships amongst leaders, providing peer support—critical in maintaining changing social norms and in laying the groundwork for an effective, compassionate and sustained interfaith campaign.

### Theory of Change



### Evaluation Design & Methodology

**Design:** Mixed methods and quasi-experimental

**Data sources:** Quantitative survey (baseline and endline); qualitative assessment (focus group discussions and key informant interviews at endline)

**Secondary data sources:** Program reports; Faith Leader GBV Toolkit; and relevant reports published by international organizations, researchers and government ministries

**Sample size:** Quantitative survey at baseline: n=594, n=2,639 at endline (including control group) and seven focus group discussions with between 17-30 participants each

**Sample groups:** Christian and Muslim clergy, lay leaders, members of the Technical Working Group of the Inter-religious Council of Liberia, county-level faith leaders, youth leaders, school-based GBV committee members and female congregants

**Locations:** Rivercess County, Grand Cape Mount County (two program areas) and Montserrado County (non-intervention area)

**Target beneficiaries:** Women and girls who are survivors of violence; and leaders and members of churches and mosques  
**Secondary beneficiaries:** Christian and Muslim faith leaders; school staff; and youth ages 15-35.

Figure 1.  
Prevalence (%) of women and girls  
experiencing physical/sexual intimate  
partner violence

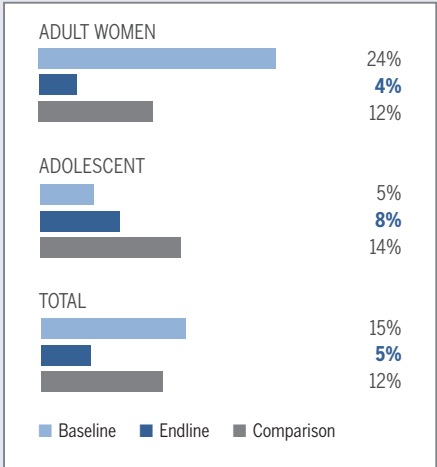
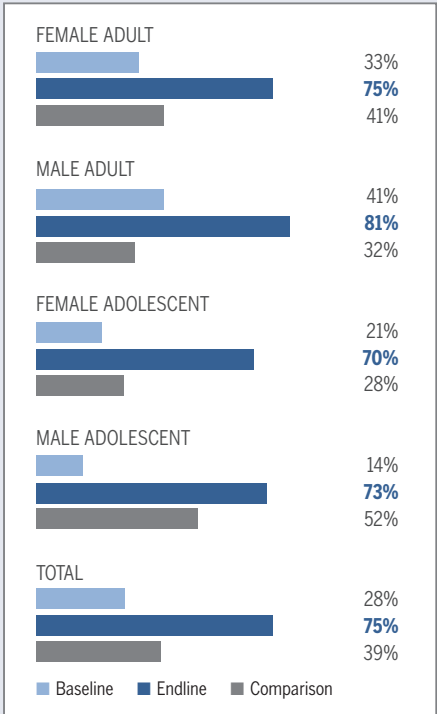


Figure 2.  
Percent of congregational members that know  
of available support services for women and  
girls who are experiencing violence



## Key Findings

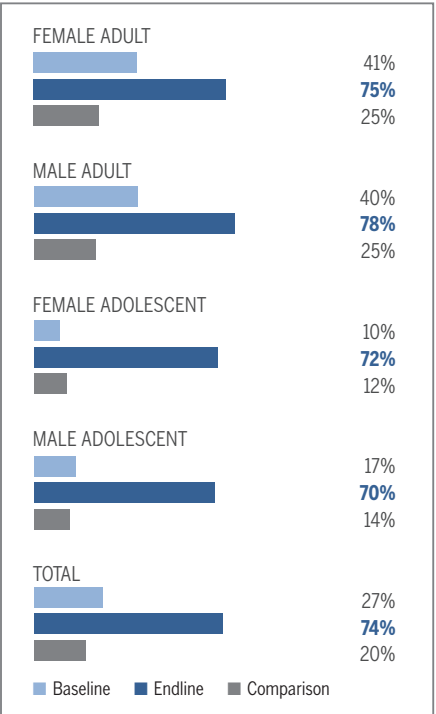
### 1. Reduction in VAW/G and Increased Awareness of Survivor Support and Services

Endline results showed a 16% reduction in physical and sexual partner violence across both counties. Focus group discussions indicate that faith and youth leader-led VAW/G awareness and survivor support played an important role in this reduction. Women reported a 51% decrease of physical or sexual partner violence, from 24% to 12% (Figure 1). However, the rate increased for adolescent girls from 5% to 14%. Exactly why there was an increase in physical and sexual violence is not clear. It is possible that adolescent girls felt more comfortable disclosing at endline due to the intervention or the low sample size at baseline is causing a bias.<sup>2</sup> Despite the limitations in quantitative results, qualitative evidence demonstrates there is a perceived decline in VAW/G. One adolescent girl in a focus group discussion shared, “Rape has reduced because cases are now being reported compare to before when people would settle it within the family.”

*“There are a lot of changes. At first when my husband beat me, it remained inside our room and I didn’t dare tell anyone, but now if he tries I can run outside and let people know.”* – Woman in Grand Cape Mount

Female congregants interviewed who experienced violence during the intervention phase reported seeking help from a faith leader. Faith leaders in both counties reported that they most commonly provided counseling and referral to hospitals. When faith leaders helped survivors of violence access medical assistance and seek justice, many women reported feeling freer to speak their minds and share their experiences with others.

Figure 3.  
Percent of congregational members who  
believe that faith leaders in their community  
are actively working to stop VAW/G



In addition, the program successfully increased women and girls’ knowledge of existing support services for survivors of violence, and how to access them. Sixty-two percent of female congregants (a 10-fold increase from baseline) confirmed they learned about existing VAW/G support services from their faith leaders, who also encouraged them to report cases of VAW/G to faith leaders and law enforcement. Seventy-five percent of community members (both male and female) knew where to seek services at endline, compared to 28% at baseline (Figure 2).

By the end of the program, 70-78% (depending on age and gender) of congregants surveyed identified faith leaders as a source of support to women and girls who had experienced violence (Figure 3). Women also acknowledged faith leaders and County GBV Task Force members’ role in improving links with law enforcement and in reducing bribery.

<sup>2</sup> Sample Size – Baseline: 42 adult women and 134 adolescent girls;  
Endline: 207 adult women and 134 adolescent girls.





## 2. Changes in Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Gender Equity

The evaluation reported positive shifts in perceptions and attitudes, with quantitative results showing that gender attitudes improved overall in both counties, and interestingly, in Grand Cape Mount, more so among men and boys than women and girls.<sup>3</sup> It is unclear why the data suggests women's attitudes are changing less quickly than men's. However, due to a small sample size and challenges at baseline, we cannot be conclusive about what the data suggests. The greatest positive shifts were in non-acceptability of sexual violence, acknowledgment of women's rights, the role of the community in responding to violence, and equitable gender attitudes (Figures 4 and 5).

*"Before the program, we didn't know we had the same rights as men, but thought we had to do what the man says. For example, we believed we didn't have a right to go to school and instead have to take care of our household. We also believed we didn't have a right to sit with men and talk or make decisions."* – Woman in Grand Cape Mount

As part of their training, faith leaders were asked to analyze, read and discuss sacred texts in new ways in light of their understanding of VAW/G, thus shifting the interpretation of certain scriptures that have often been used to reinforce concepts of male dominance and other gender biases. During the course of the training and program, faith leaders internalize these concepts, incorporating VAW/G messages into their sermons. After

Figure 4.  
Changes in Attitudes | Cape Mount  
Negative numbers reflect an overall decline in the acceptability of VAW/G

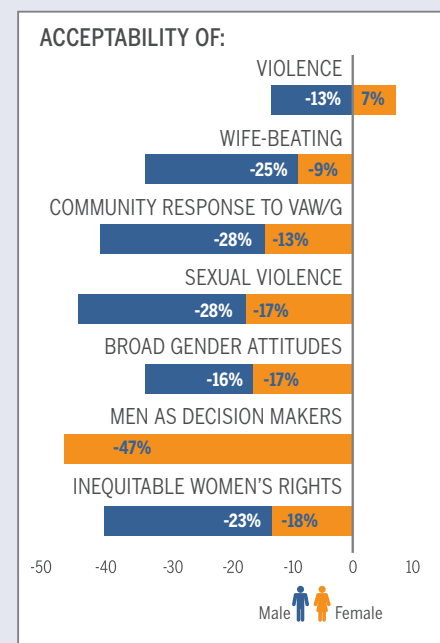
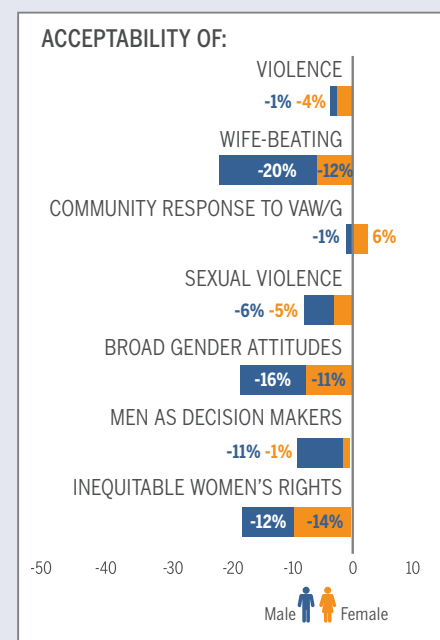


Figure 5.  
Changes in Attitudes | Rivercess  
Negative numbers reflect an overall decline in the acceptability of VAW/G



<sup>3</sup> Further research is required due to limitations of the evaluation study. See section 8.6 of the full report.

Figure 6.  
Percent of congregational members who have heard at least one clergy member publicly speaking out against VAW/G

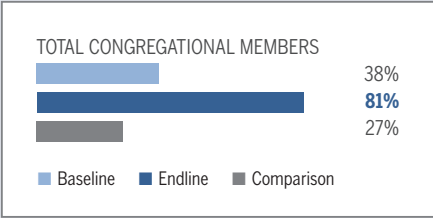
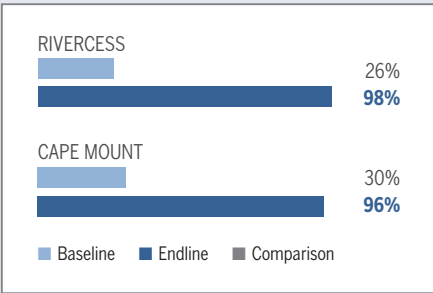


Figure 7.  
Percent of trained youth faith leaders who report publicly speaking out against VAW/G during the past year



the intervention, 80% of congregants in both counties reported hearing at least one clergy member speaking out publicly against VAW/G, compared to 38% at baseline. Evaluation data shows 74 % of congregants recognized and trusted faith leaders to prevent or respond to violence post-intervention, compared to 27% at baseline (Figure 6).

*“Imams never used to talk about VAW/G issues in the mosques, but since this program came into this community they are now speaking about it.”*

– Woman in Grand Cape Mount

The study saw a significant increase in youth leaders (ages 15-35) raising awareness and publicly speaking out against VAW/G at schools and public forums, with 97% engaged in awareness activities at endline compared to 29% at baseline (Figure 7). The learning-action dialogue approach (using Fact, Association, Meaning and Action cards (FAMA) and drama skits) has been effective in engaging young people and their communities about the consequences of VAW/G, and in challenging the notion that violence against women and girls is part of their culture.

*“They would say: You don’t tell me what to do, this is my culture! We would tell them that a so-called culture should not stop people from changing or allow hurting others and that “culture” could be wrong too. They value our education today and things are slowly changing.”*

– Youth Faith Leader in Cape Mount

Male youth leaders demonstrated changes in their mindsets and behaviors after receiving training on types of violence, gender roles, power and masculinities.

*“Before the program, I used to beat my wife, it was my habit. But when I joined this program I realized it is not good to beat your wife and have since stopped.”* – Youth Faith Leader

## Promising Practices

### 1. Using a Process of Self-reflection and Discovery to Understand and Take Action Against VAW/G

The ELM approach in the Faith Leader’s GBV Toolkit uses a gradual and thorough process of self-examination and discovery, which has proven to be successful in changing mindsets in gender roles and attitudes. It creates space to deconstruct and challenge deep-seated beliefs that perpetuate inequality and violence. Participants are part of a participatory and cyclical process of concrete experience, reflection, analysis and action, specifically designed to solicit the self-identification, reflection and analysis of a topic, aligned with learning objectives. The process relies on learnings coming from participants using and discussing scripture while drawing on their own experience, observations and reactions.

### 2. Using a Multi-stakeholder Collaborative Approach

The multi-stakeholder approach (involving government ministries, service providers, law enforcement, ECL-RD, the County-level Faith Leader Coalitions and youth representatives) has resulted in a functioning and improved referral





network. Networks across sectors and levels allow civil society, including faith institutions, to work in collaboration with government partners, to understand policies and to hold government accountable when needed.

### 3. Implementers with a Local Presence

A constant local presence has proven indispensable to the program's impact in the target counties. ECL-RD field staff are knowledgeable about VAW/G in their communities and have strong relationships with local leaders and social organizations. They meet regularly with stakeholders from religious organizations, schools, government agencies and community organizations, and provide direct support to individuals and families affected by VAW/G.

### 4. Using an integrated, interfaith response to VAW/G

The program's comprehensive training methodology and the Toolkit are designed from an interfaith perspective. Unlike other faith-based VAW/G teaching tools and methodologies, the program is centered on engaging Christian and Muslim leaders in the same room, at the same time and with the same tools. Pastors and imams are reading, dissecting and comparing teachings from the Bible and the Qur'an together. This allows for insight into the many similarities between their teachings, especially as they relate to gender roles and empowering women and girls. The process is respectful and worthwhile, as faith leaders know that VAW/G transcends religious divisions and that the process also unites religious doctrines and practices.

## Way Forward

- Increase engagement with community women's groups to better understand the difference in attitude change between men and women
- Continue building new leaders by engaging youth to examine masculinity and gender roles through discussions and drama groups
- Replicate faith-based training and advocacy model in other counties in Liberia
- Diversify local funding support
- Strengthen the organizational structure of the IRCL TWG
- Expand the Toolkit to include trauma resilience and child protection



This is a summary of the external evaluation report: “*Engaging Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Women and Girls in Liberia 2015-2017*”. The report was prepared by Dr. Seema Vyas (Gender and Development Specialist), Matthias Zingel (Evaluation Specialist) and Joseph Nyan (Data Collection Specialist).

The purpose of this summary is to exchange knowledge between Episcopal Relief & Development, The Episcopal Church of Liberia Relief & Development, the Liberian government, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, and Islamic Relief USA. The content of the external evaluation and this brief does not imply official endorsement by or reflect the official opinion of the United Nations, IRUSA, its Islamic Relief affiliates, or its donors.

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

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