



GIZ Gender Competition 2022 Entry GG2: Engaging Religious and traditional actors to prevent Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The key principle of the regional programme “Partnerships for Prevention for Gender-Based Violence in Southern Africa (PfP)”¹ is to alter social norms and practices that instigate GBV and to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships for joint implementation of prevention activities to leverage financial and technical contributions of various actors. Moving from the first into the follow-on phase starting Dec 1, 2021, PfP II continues on the path set out by PfP I, with the shift from mainly focusing on improving the coordination amongst relevant stakeholders to establish multi-sectoral networks for primary prevention to dedicating resources to the implementation of innovative and specific flagships for the prevention of GBV, mainly intimate partner violence (IPV).

An essential role for the promotion of good practices for GBV prevention is attributed to the regional dimension of the project: on the one hand, the regional approach guarantees that best practices and lessons learnt can be shared in an institutionalized exchange between the partner countries. On the other hand, the regional dimension creates opportunities for practitioners to exchange, who might otherwise not have entered into dialogue. This brings the chance to develop new and innovative initiatives, while exchanging ideas and challenges regionally that are informed by the practitioners’ local and context-specific experiences.

Overall, the project contributes to increasing coherence in the approaches in the region and feeds into the [SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender-Based Violence 2018 – 2030](#).

Why work with religious and traditional actors on GBV prevention?

GBV is a global phenomenon. An estimate of one woman in three experiences some type of violence in her lifetime. Yet, in the PfP partner countries South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho GBV prevalence is particularly high and has been further exacerbated by the outbreak of Covid-19 and respective lockdown measures. Reportedly between half and two-thirds of all women and girls state that they have experienced violence at some point in their lives. Often, partner countries recognize both statutory laws and customary practices, the latter placing particular relevance on religious and traditional actors (RTA). Knowing that more than 80% of people worldwide affiliate with a religion, it seems to be only logical to engage with religious and traditional communities in order to change harmful social norms and stereotypes. Over the recent years, German development cooperation has increased its efforts in becoming a champion in working with religious and traditional actors for positive change as laid out in the [BMZ strategy “Religious Communities as Partners for Development Cooperation”](#).

Religious communities often provide social services to their communities as well as guidance, marital consultation and comfort in times of distress. Religious and traditional actors (RTA) play an integral part

¹ Note: new name from Dec 1, 2021; the abbreviation “PfP” remains

in shaping norms and values around gender relations and family matters, especially in rural communities. Any activity to prevent GBV must bear the ambivalence of religious and traditional authorities in mind, on one hand as potential 'agents of change' for gender equality but also as possible adversaries to advancing gender equality.

Guided by both a human rights-based as well as value based approach, in 2018 the PfP programme embarked on the journey of taking the contribution of RTA seriously in preventing GBV with the aim of supporting processes that get RTA as partners on board for positive change, becoming one of the most successful flagship project that not only in itself bore many positive results, but incentivized further activities.

Where it started – Pioneering work with religious and traditional actors in Zambia

Christianity is the official religion in Zambia (constitutional since 1996), with between 82% and 98% of the country identifying as Christian. Religious bodies have a broad legitimacy and enjoy a high level of trust. Additionally, Zambia recognizes both statutory laws and customary practices. Thus, traditional authorities (tribal chiefs/chieftainess and head/wo/men) are often responsible for justice and brokering marriages on the grounds of customary law, while civil matters, including marriages, are handled by civil servants.

Establishing the flagship of working on and with RTA to explore avenues for GBV prevention started 2018 with a cooperation between PfP and the Sector Programme Religion and Development. In that year a Religious and Traditional Actors Mapping (RAM) was implemented in the Southern Province of Zambia in the districts of Monze, Choma, Livingstone. The RAM was conducted to analyse which RTA are present in the project area and what development activities they are engaged in. Importantly, the mapping also included an inventory of the views espoused by these stakeholders in relation to gender and GBV.

The findings of the mapping were used to inform a series of round table discussions, where RTA met to share and discuss their views, including on theological interpretation of scripture. Scripture Training, also called Contextual Bible Study, was conducted by an evaluator and pastor. Underpinning these activities, RTA were also trained in gender transformative approaches. Consequently, participants signed a 'statement of commitment' that represents a consensus among the actors that is in line with the statutory laws of Zambia and present messages that contribute to preventing GBV.

Finally, the participants produced a **position paper for traditional actors** and a **sermon guide for religious actors**. These documents outline the agreements made during the round-table discussions on what messages to convey during traditional gatherings and ceremonies, weddings and church services. The documents were formally endorsed by all ten Chiefs as well as the four Church Mother Boards in Monze, Choma and Livingstone and distributed to headmen and -women, clergy and laymen and women. It was further disseminated to the villages and churches. This way, preventative messages are disseminated to women and men throughout the project area by some of the most important opinion shapers. It was also used to discuss existing bylaws in chiefdoms.

Creating evidence-based interventions and recommendations for upscaling

Despite global investment and publications that demonstrate progress in the past years, evidence on which approaches are effective in preventing GBV is still much needed to inform policymaking and programme development. The PfP flagship project was accompanied by operational research, which captured some of the following findings and recommendations:

Provide **Safe spaces** for joint dialogues of RTA:

- Create safe spaces to allow for mutual learning, encouraging trust and relationship building. Ensure round table dialogues are joined by both religious and traditional actors.



Implemented by



- Duration: 4 days per round table dialogue and not less than 4 round tables, spread over minimum 4 months, are necessary to ensure enough time for exchange, network building and guaranteeing ownership of the stakeholders to initiate and sustain change in their respective communities.
- The primary function of traditional practices and religious preaching is to pass on certain values. While, what is being communicated in traditional practices or religious preaching may have unintended negative impacts, the importance and validity of certain values being passed on remains. Thus, the dialogues must focus on how to adapt messages by and through RTA to ensure contents are aligned with universal human rights and for lives free of GBV.
- Issue based discussion: Outline the fact that all RTA are affected by GBV and have the expertise and access to their communities to initiate positive change.
- From the beginning, set clear goals and objectives that are shared and understood by all participants. Re-confirm goals and objectives over time and adjust, if necessary.
- Provide a flexible structure of dialogue workshops that encourages participant engagement.

Facilitate **continuous learning** for sustainability:

- Extensively train facilitators. Facilitators are key to the dialogue process as they ensure RTAs feel safe to share and discuss on sensitive topics
- Include gender-transformative training opportunities for facilitators and stakeholders, to avoid the perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypical behavior or practices.
- Establish regular meetings involving the same stakeholders. This promotes network building.
- Invest in community sensitization by role model who have been transformed.

Use of **Contextual Issue Study methodology** should:

- Provide templates for easy use to develop sermon guides and position paper which are documents and commitments for participants' use and referencing.
- Ensure to support the revision of the bylaws so that they are also aligned with the position paper that participants have committed to. Allow min. 2 months for revision and harmonization of bylaws.
- Thorough preparation is needed for Traditional actors since a lot of their teachings are orally done.
- Promoting wide roll-out of Contextual Issue studies for RTA to prevent literal scriptural interpretation and literal interpretation of cultural expressions that perpetuate VAWG.

Regional Spillover Effect

Based on the regional nature of PfP and the very good experiences and achievements in Zambia, a positive spillover within the PfP partner countries but also beyond was inevitable.

The promising results of this flagship and the main conclusions and learnings for further adaptation and replicability of this preventative approach were presented in December 2019 at the **regional conference** titled "Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls in Southern Africa - From Evidence to Action" co-organized by PfP and the SADC Gender Unit. The event was attended by over 200 participants from government, civil society, academia and private sector joining from all countries of the Southern African Development Community.

Shortly after and just before the Covid-19 outbreak, a **study trip of the religious and traditional Actors from Zambia to Lesotho** took place. During the study visit, a three-day workshop as a **regional exchange between the Zambian and Lesotho** RAM was organized. The aim was to generate interest in exploring the nexus of GBV and RTA in Lesotho, while elaborating on the RAM methodology anchored in the positive experiences from Zambia through a peer-to-peer exchange. Another objective was to overall raise awareness on the topic of GBV against women and girls and on the topic of gender equality. At the end of

the Workshop, the interest of the Basotho stakeholders was sparked, and all stakeholders were keen to replicate and adapt the Zambian approach in Lesotho.

Despite the Covid-19 Outbreak, the interest to replicate and adapt the Zambian approach in Lesotho remained, so the process of a **religious and traditional actors mapping for Lesotho started in October 2021** and is expected to be concluded in March 2022. Guided by the findings and recommendations of the Lesotho specific RAM as well as the experiences in Zambia, targeted measures will follow.

Moreover, news of the **promising approaches and experiences made in PfP also travelled across project limits over into the bilateral portfolio in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe**. The Inclusive Violence and Crime Prevention Programm (VCP) in South Africa is now also setting out to conduct a RAM. In this process, the colleagues of the Sector Programme Religion and Development, VCP and PfP are in close coordination, to create synergies and promote mutual learning. In Zambia, the programme “Strengthening Girls’ Rights: Reproductive Health, Family Planning and HIV prevention for learners, especially girls” is replicating the round-table process in 3 provinces with the aim to strengthen support of religious and traditional leaders towards young people accessing essential information and services. In Zimbabwe, PfP used this approach to enter into a dialogue with RTA to prevent early child marriage. The potential for adaptability and scalability of the approach has been proven with the examples above.

Achievement Highlights of Religious and Traditional Actors Flagship Activities	
Highlights in Zambia	Regional Spillover Effects
Workshops on Gender transformation/feminist theology have been conducted: e.g. discussion of the patriarchal influences in the bible and how RTA interpret scriptures respectively.	Presentation of RAM findings and dialogue process at regional conference
Position paper and sermon guides agreed upon as well as signed by religious and traditional actors that take part in the programme. The documents have been disseminated and are actively used.	Study Visit to Lesotho for exchange of Basotho and Zambian RTA
Needs assessment conducted on how bylaws that prevent GBV can be formulated: A stock taking was conducted on the chiefdoms to ascertain their status on bylaws.	Implementation of RAM in Lesotho; PfP in the lead, supported from the Sector Programme Religion and Development
4 Round table discussions held with RTA incl. topics of polygamy and lobola (Bride Price).	Initial stages of preparing RAM in South Africa; VCP in the lead, with support from Sector Programme Religion and Development and PfP

To ensure good **knowledge management** and that good practices and experiences are accessible to the public, a set of knowledge products have been prepared. On the [Resource Hub](#) on the PfP Website a recently [updated factsheet](#) on the experiences of the Zambia RTA flagship as well as a [RTA policy brief](#) targeted at decision-makers and programmers are available, so the approach can be further implemented in other countries.