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May 2024

ADVANCING GENDER JUSTICE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Examples of Projects by ACT Alliance Members

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Examples of Projects by ACT Alliance Members

In a world where faith perspectives can both challenge and champion gender equality, women's and LGBTQI+ rights, and SRHR, ACT Alliance EU stands as a leading network of progressive faith-based humanitarian and development organisations dedicated to advocating for human rights and gender justice.

This booklet showcases concrete examples from members of ACT Alliance EU and the global ACT Alliance, detailing their efforts to safeguard human rights and counter the backlash against progressive gender policies and shrinking civic space.

These examples contributed to the *Roundtable discussion on Advancing Gender Justice in Difficult Times – What Role for Faith Based Organisations and the EU?* organised during the annual ACT Alliance EU General Assembly of 29 May 2024.



Students Being Trained with Easily Accessible Materials in Myanmar – © Bax Lindhardt

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Religion, Rights, and Resistance: Faith-based Narratives for a Life Free of Violence in Argentina

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Project implemented by the ACT Alliance Argentina Forum and FESUR - South America Ecumenical Forum (both fora of member organisations of ACT), in partnership with the Protestant Foundation 'Hora de Obrar' and SEDI. The project ran from June 2021, accompanied by the ACT Gender Justice Programme (2021-2022).

Overview

ACT Argentina Forum's project 'Nos Contamos' strengthened gender justice and rights-based narratives within local churches. Using different communication platforms, feminist theologies contributed to dismantling fundamentalist discourse which fuel push backs on human rights and gender equality.

The project successfully created spaces for critical reflection on hegemonic gender roles and to root approaches to transformative masculinities in Jesus of the gospels. It also brought together faith communities to co-create narratives that affirm language promoting human rights and gender equality, which included SRHR, freedom and dignity.

To develop intergenerational dialogue and debates, transmedia platforms¹ were used. These helped to renew attention to the history of the struggle for women's rights and gender justice in light of the current context.

To ensure comprehensive health services for women and girls, and social protection that puts the rights of women and girls at the centre,

¹ Transmedia storytelling (or multiplatform storytelling) involves creating content which resides across multiple

the project mobilised faith communities to advocate for greater financial investment from the State. This included advocating for and contributing to implementation of Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE). Since 2006, this is mandatory across the curriculum in Argentina but continues to face resistance.

To address the resistance to CSE, the project included holding various interaction spaces and capacity building for faith actors to explore CSE in relation to the Bible. For example, a gospel passage was used as a basis for intergenerational dialogue on reproductive justice.

The 'Hora de Obrar' Foundation launched virtual training in partnership with the Ecumenical Network for Theological Education (REET). They offered resources for various ministries of the church, in particular, those closest to families and communities.

Challenges

While the project was able to mobilise faith communities to affirm human rights and gender justice, there are still sensitivities to overcome in such work. Increasing polarisation in political, religious, and social levels is resulting in fundamentalist discourse that publicly challenges gender equality. This generates resistance to the implementation of related laws and policies.

Secondly, the use of language and construction of narratives require contextualisation and careful consideration. In this project, rather than attempt to engage in debates with messages of hate which are often legitimised with religious discourse, 'Nos Contamos'

formats and platforms. The method intuitively leads audiences to conceptualise the synergies and fill gaps, building resonance and engagement with their daily lives.

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instead sought to build dialogues building on the biblical concept of love. It also focused on addressing gender inequalities and healing painful related experiences which are encountered in churches.

Thirdly, resistance to comprehensive sexual education, in certain sectors of society, is also palpable at the grassroots of the churches. However, the topic was integrated into discussions, using a methodology to contextualise bible studies and thereby address the theological underpinnings. Often younger people of the churches raised their voices and brought the issue onto the agenda.

This raises the final challenge the project has sought to address: generating reflections and discussions on intergenerational relations and how to accompany parents raising children with the new context they live in.

Opportunities

An important element of the project was to make the commitment to gender justice, countering fundamentalist discourse and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence visible. By working with faith communities and faith-based partners, the project generated a public voice, rooted in the churches. By ensuring each community could adapt materials according to their contexts, this enabled the participation of a greater number of different faith communities.

By amplifying a collective transformative faith voice, the project also connected with secular feminist organisations and strengthened dialogue and collaboration. This was further amplified through advocacy by ACT members in UN advocacy spaces, such as the UN Commission on Population and Development.

Materials and references

- Nos Contamos [YouTube Channel](#)
- The ACT Argentina Forum project is featured in the High-Level Commission on the [Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 Follow-up 2022 Report](#)
- Religion, Rights and Reproductive Justice ([UN CPD56 Side Event](#), with Norway, Argentina and UNFPA, 2023)
- Faith in Gender Justice [LinkedIn Page](#)
- More about the Hora de Obrar Foundation's [virtual training](#) addressed to various ministries of the church

Teaching for Change: Biblical Engagements with Gender, Sexuality, and Religion from the Global South

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Implemented by Act Church of Sweden.

Overview

Tools for mitigating gender justice backlashes require both short- and long-term strategies for engagement with faith actors. Act Church of Sweden (Act CoS) has developed different strategies from both perspectives. As actors working to promote increased respect and enjoyment of gender equality and SRHR for all, we need to respond to polarisation and pushback by increasing coordinated efforts and exchange.

The organisation has worked on and with tools & best practices for bridging and building trust in polarised environments. We work with partners in-country on SRHR, gender, and LGBTIQ+. This has led to some good practices in mediating difficult conversations.

For instance, this has included supporting current and prospective actors in-country who play a key role in shaping gender, sexuality and religion curricula, narratives and norms at education, policy, and community levels. We work together to offer good practice examples on teaching and engaging at community level on GBV and faith and sexuality. We share methods for use of the Bible in discussions surrounding gender and sexuality within the religious landscape.

Act CoS also supports emerging theology on the African continent on issues of sexuality and theology. Considering the current situation

pertaining to LGBTIQ+ rights in Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia, learnings from practitioners in Southern Africa will aim to offer reflections on interventions aimed at addressing homophobic hate crimes and violence. These reflections draw on faith and theology as possible resources for enhancing interventions.

Challenges

The Bible is frequently used in contemporary African faith communities to condemn LGBTIQ+ people. In ethical debates and discussions, rather than providing a basis for dialogue, the Bible is often misused and prevents explorations of scriptures on how to enable diverse life together.

The funding environment for theological education is very polarised, with heavy funds from conservative actors.

Opportunities

To address the many challenges, theological education is a powerful tool for countering religious opposition by promoting a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of faith that respects diversity and embraces dialogue. Theological education can be used effectively in the following ways:

- Promoting Critical Thinking:

Theological education can foster critical thinking skills, encouraging questioning and critical analysis of religious texts and doctrines. This approach helps to counter rigid interpretations of scripture that are often at the core of fundamentalist ideologies.

- Encouraging Interfaith Engagement:

Incorporating interfaith dialogue and studies into theological curricula can give people

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exposure to a variety of religious beliefs and practices. This exposure can reduce fear and suspicion towards different faith communities and help build respect and understanding.

- Focusing on Contextual Theology:

Contextual theology considers the interplay between faith and the socio-cultural context in which it is practised. Theological education shaped on this approach can help build understanding of how historical, cultural, and political factors influence religious beliefs and practices. This understanding can mitigate the appeal of fundamentalism, which often ignores or oversimplifies these complexities.

- Integrating Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies:

Courses on peace and conflict resolution can equip future religious leaders with the tools necessary to mediate and resolve conflicts within their communities. These skills are crucial for countering the often divisive and confrontational tactics of fundamentalist movements.

- Highlighting the Ethical Dimensions of Religion:

Teaching on the ethical dimensions of religious texts and traditions can emphasise love, justice, and compassion over punitive or exclusionary interpretations. This approach can counter the often harsh, judgmental stances taken by fundamentalist groups.

- Enhancing Gender Mainstreaming and diversity engagement skills:

There is often a lack of vocabulary and resources to inform progressive engagements with gender and sexuality.

- Learning from Progressive Theologies:

Encouraging engagement with liberation theology and other progressive religious movements within theological education can inspire students to focus on social justice, poverty alleviation, and human rights, drawing attention away from divisive and regressive religious practices.

- Building Global Religious Literacy:

Educating students about global religious trends, including the rise of religious fundamentalism and its impact, prepares them to better understand and engage with these challenges in informed ways.

Advocating for policy reform on SRHR in Honduras

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Implemented by ACT Alliance member and Act Church of Sweden partner Ecumenicas por el Derecho a Decidir (EDD) 2022–2023.

Overview

Honduran partner Ecumenicas por el Derecho a Decidir (EDD) works for gender equality and SRHR from a faith-based perspective. They have been advocating for the decriminalisation of emergency contraceptives in Honduras. Over the past three years, EDD has been engaging religious leaders in dialogue about emergency contraceptives. Despite initial resistance, many religious leaders eventually agreed to engage with the dialogues and came to accept and better understand emergency contraceptives.

In Honduras, there are close ties between religious leaders and politicians. During the 2023 parliamentary vote to decriminalise emergency contraceptives, there was no opposition, and the vote passed. EDD believes that the absence of opposition may, in part, be attributed to many religious leaders being on board after their dialogues.

Another contributing factor was advocacy support. Nordic parliamentarians, with Sweden taking the lead, wrote a letter to the President of Honduras urging respect for women's rights and the decriminalisation of emergency contraceptives. EDD stated that the letter from the parliamentarians provided them a crucial advocacy tool.

Challenges and Opportunities

The importance of EDD's success in advocating for decriminalisation cannot be overlooked,

especially considering the repressive context of Honduras concerning SRHR. Honduras faces significant and organised opposition to SRHR, and as a faith-based actor, EDD is particularly vulnerable. Their advocacy efforts have exposed them to threats of kidnapping and threats to the lives of their staff.

It is crucial to support partners and utilise policy platforms available in our European contexts when they can provide substantial support to partners' advocacy work, especially for those operating in repressive contexts.

Materials and references

Nordic Parliamentarians encourage Honduran President on safe abortion and SRHR rights | EPF (epfweb.org)

Development of knowledge production on marginalised gender issues

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Collaboration among various actors across the world, led by the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland.

Overview

Act Church of Sweden contributed to a new anthology titled “Reimagining Faith and Abortion: A Global Perspective”. In this anthology, leaders, scholars, and activists from around the world provide their perspective on faith and abortion. They reflect on examples of faith organisations that have taken leadership roles on this issue and examine religious approaches from Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and interfaith perspectives.

The discussion surrounding abortion and faith often assumes that all faiths are inherently anti-abortion, and consequently, that being a person of faith means being anti-abortion. Whilst abortion has often been utilised as a focal point for the religious right and conservative forces globally, a collective of activists, academics, and faith leaders sought to examine alternative narratives.

The book documents the work of different faith actors and their efforts to provide alternative religious approaches that affirm reproductive justice. It examines how abortion can be addressed in faith settings and how the principles of reproductive justice can help navigate the intersections of faith and abortion. By challenging the assumption that all people of faith are anti-abortion, this anthology offers a counterpoint to mainstream perspectives and outlines how faith communities can, and have,

reimagined abortion as an issue of social, pastoral and theological concern.

Featuring perspectives from across the globe, the anthology includes discussions from settings where abortion is legal, restricted, stigmatised, or those where it is normalised. It also demonstrates the complex connections between faith and abortion, how women and pregnant people are positioned in society and how morality is claimed and challenged.

Contributors at the launch event included perspectives from South Africa, Sweden, Malaysia, Malawi, Argentina, Sri Lanka, United States, and Northern Ireland.

Challenges and Opportunities

There are many misconceptions and stigmas surrounding abortion, and as a result of backlashes, many individuals working on these issues operate under pressure and within shrinking civic spaces.

It is important to develop resources that bring together civil society, academic, and faith actors, especially to build new narratives or present forgotten narratives around gender.

Examining the intersection of faith and abortion is a relatively small field of activity, which has been under-researched in the social sciences. The authors present a diversity of perspectives that often remain hidden from mainstream discourse. They make a case that such diversity exists and has always existed, highlighting historical and present diversity within religions.

Materials and references

[Policy Press](#) | Reimagining Faith and Abortion - A Global Perspective, Edited by Fiona Bloomer and Kellie Turtle (bristoluniversitypress.co.uk).

Strengthening Citizens Action for Gender Justice in Nigeria

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Implemented by Christian Aid Nigeria in partnership with The African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) from June 2022 to February 2024.

Overview

The initiative was conceptualised in response to the increasing cases of violence against women and girls and human rights abuses. The response requires community-based, multi-pronged approach and sustained engagements with multiple stakeholders.

Traditional and religious leaders are individuals who wield enormous influence among their followers and, therefore, it is imperative to engage and actively seek their participation in entrenching gender justice into their various institutions. With this objective in mind, Christian Aid Nigeria and partners engaged with religious and traditional leaders using the platform of the Nigeria chapter of Side-by-Side Faith Movement for Gender Justice.

The initiative aimed at building capacities of faith and traditional leaders in the North Central zone on Rights-Based Advocacy (RBA) and changing theological perspectives on gender justice. 42 traditional and religious leaders, of whom 33 were men and nine were women, were trained.

The trained leaders were mobilised to establish networks of the Side-by-Side movement in all geopolitical zones (North Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and South-South) in Nigeria. The trained leaders conducted trainings for their congregations and undertook advocacy visits to relevant

stakeholders to call for gender justice in their respective states.

The initiative has also developed a policy document for both Christian and Muslim faiths. It serves as a guide for addressing gender issues in faith institutions and a sermon guide for the preparation of sermons by religious leaders. A training manual titled "Ending Gender-Based Violence: A training manual for Religious Leaders" was also recently launched to enhance the knowledge of faith and traditional leaders on GBV, its magnitude, consequences, root causes, and how gender injustice is perpetuated.

The initiative also led to a short playlet to create awareness of the dangers of FGM and advocate for the elimination of harmful traditional practices. A gender justice curriculum was also developed and integrated into the curriculum of the Strategic Leadership Academy, an academy which trains prospective pastors and faith leaders on leadership.

Advocacy by faith leaders have contributed to the amendment of the marriage age for girls and the adoption of a new policy direction on girl-child education in Kano state, as more Imams and Ulamas now highlight issues of gender justice in their sermons. In Imo state, a faith leader has promulgated in support of women's inheritance rights. In Enugu state, there is now an increase in women's participation in traditional leadership roles (councils), which used to be an exclusive male domain, while in Taraba state, the movement has facilitated collaboration with the state government to start vocational skills training for women.

Challenges

- *Lack of adequate resources:* There is a lack of adequate funding to carry out activities with faith actors to promote gender justice in the various zones. A fundraising strategy needs to be developed.
- *Gender discriminatory laws in Nigeria:* The penal code has some components that suggest that men can ‘discipline’ their wives. These kinds of laws still represent a challenge to the fight for gender justice. Such laws can still be used against the movement, especially by some religious leaders who do not consider women as their equal counterparts.
- *Entrenched Harmful Cultural Norms:* Deeply entrenched negative norms still affect the acceptance of the movement’s messages. There are many traditional and religious leaders who still do not believe in the idea of Gender justice. It is challenging to bring them under the fold of the Side-by-Side network.
- *Limited GBV Response Capacity:* The Side-by-Side movement does not have strong capacity to respond to GBV situations. At present, they are focused on prevention messaging and conducting referrals.

Opportunities

- The model of working with faith and traditional leaders in promoting gender justice is a novel approach towards achieving gender equality. Traditional rulers are custodians of the culture and traditions that predispose women to violence and harmful practices. On the other hand, religious leaders are generally seen as the mouthpieces of God, and how they interpret religious texts shapes the

views and opinions of their followers. Engaging with these critical stakeholders as champions for the promotion of gender justice and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls can be effective.

- There is a great similarity between the beliefs of the two major religions in Nigeria – Islam and Christianity – on Gender Justice. Both religions are strong promoters of gender justice, but the holy books are often misinterpreted by many people. Therefore, working on promoting pro-gender justice interpretations of holy texts presents a significant opportunity.
- Working with faith and traditional leaders has made women more forthcoming towards sharing their issues. They now view traditional and religious leaders as supporters and allies in the push for gender justice.

Materials and references

- [A Royal Decree: A film on FGM](#)
- Side-by-Side Faith Movement for Gender Justice [website](#)

Changing Discriminatory Laws in Uganda to Obtain Gender Equality

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Implemented by DanChurchAid from 2018 to 2022, in partnership with ACT Forum Uganda, UWONET and Churches, co-financed by UN and Danida.

Overview

The project engages faith actors who are involved with the Uganda ACT Alliance Forum to unfold their potential for support of gender justice. The project facilitates faith leaders in revisiting the normative narratives in holy scriptures of the faith communities (Bible, Quran) with gender-sensitive lenses to rediscover the liberating discourse of all people being created equal in the image of God and what it means for power relationships and accountability. With this deeper understanding, the already influential faith leaders can contribute significantly to shaping and changing gender norms and practices of the communities over time.

In parallel, faith leaders are empowered with legal knowledge: in recognition of their leadership role in communities and in society, the project aims to build their understanding of policies, institutions, and the legal framework to enable them to better discern and address acts and practices of GBV and help build a culture of Gender Justice. In turn, this means that faith leaders deliver better in the communities by referring cases of GBV to medical care and juridical arbitration in addition to what they already do in their counselling. They thereby secure that processes of reconciliation do not substitute justice and restitution: "Reconciliation is not everything, sometimes you need to step out

and demand for accountability, especially if a crime is being committed" (DCA Country Office staff).

This foundational work goes hand in hand with efforts to bring together faith actors and national women's organisations with a strong rights-based approach to support them in cooperating on improving laws. Since the religious actors' new interest in the legal framework of gender justice, the parliament has started to give religious leaders space to input into other legislations as well, such as the sexual defence bill, succession bill and other legal areas where ACT Alliance Uganda Forum is being called by the parliament to give thoughts on the legislation. The project brings this access and influence together with the insights and interests of the women's organisations to build a stronger, more qualified legal consultation process that also reflects new norms, beliefs, and convictions of the community.

One successful example of this work was the cooperation between faith leaders and the women's organisation UWONET to break the stalemate of an important piece of legislation which was stranded in parliament. This law, aiming at strengthening the rights of women in family disputes, divorce procedures and inheritance issues, was first named 'the Marriage and Divorce Bill' and was blocked for years not least by faith leaders who saw it as a driver for broken relationships.

As a result of the project's dialogue between faith leaders and women's organisations, the law was given the new name, "The Family Law", and redrafted while maintaining the rights improvements for women in the first draft of the law and could thus jointly be recommended by faith leaders and women's organisations and tabled for processing by parliament.

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Challenges

- Patriarchal hermeneutics applied to the normative narratives of faith communities.
- Mutual negative stereotypes between church leaders and women rights organisations.
- Discriminatory laws – and reform stalled in the legislative process.

Opportunities

Bridge-building between women rights organisations and faith leaders was in many ways the ‘magic ingredient’ of the project. What started as a more one-sided attempt by UWONET to ‘build capacity’ of the faith leaders ended in a ‘capacity exchange’ for better mutual insight in each other’s concerns and stronger cooperation. It is a matter of building trust and talking with, not to, the faith actors (here leaders).

Materials and references

The case story above is case story 4.2 on page 15 in DCA’s report ‘Breaking the Silos’. See the full report with 5 other case stories [here](#).

Implementation of Norwegian Church Aid Comprehensive Sexuality Education Toolkit in Nigeria and South Sudan

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Implemented by NCA, co-financed by the Norwegian MFA and UNFPA in Nigeria, and Norad in South Sudan.

Overview

In June 2022, NCA launched a new Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) Toolkit for Adolescents. The toolkit is strictly aligned with the UNESCO Technical guidelines for CSE and is designed for use in long-term settings, humanitarian settings, and in and out of school.

The target of the NCA programme is out-of-school adolescents in Pulka and Monguno LGAs of Borno state, Nigeria, where there are IDP camps and most of the adolescents are out of school. Sessions are conducted twice a week for a cycle of six weeks, with 40 adolescent boys and 40 adolescent girls enrolled in each cycle. The selection criteria are adolescents aged 10 to 14 and 15 to 19, with sessions being age-segregated. Thus far, NCA programme has reached 1164 adolescents using NCA's CSE Toolkit.

In South Sudan, NCA has six CSE school clubs, with two in Budi, two in Kapoeta South in Eastern Equatoria State, one in Juba, and one in Bussere Western Bar Ghazel State. Each group comprises 20 members, ten boys and ten girls. About 630 adolescents (395 Girls and 235 Boys) completed the CSE sessions in four primary and two secondary schools so far.

The toolkit has achieved significant success in both Nigeria and South Sudan, despite being used in conservative settings where sexuality

education is not seen as appropriate for adolescents. NCA Nigeria has reported a reduction of teenage pregnancies in the project areas after the implementation of the programme in 2023.

Key to the interventions and their success has been the involvement of parents and teachers. To build trust and understanding, NCA engaged with them before and after the sessions with the adolescent participants. The scientifically based material in a language the parents and teachers understand has helped to become familiarised with the CSE toolkit and recognise its value for their children's development.

NCA believes that the systematic and thorough approach of the toolkit has demystified CSE, potentially reducing the pushback against CSE we see in the world today.

Challenges

When the NCA CSE toolkit was launched in 2022, it received a lot of positive feedback from NCA partners, faith leaders, UNFPA, WHO, NORAD, and the Norwegian MFA. Faith leaders welcomed it as an important tool which they had not had before. The CSE toolkit was promoted during a side event by the Norwegian MFA at the Population Council in New York in April 2023.

After this event, NCA experienced harassment on TikTok as well as personally targeted harassment in the form of flyers against NCA and Haldis Kårstad, the editor of the CSE toolkit. The accusations were that NCA was promoting the sexualisation of children, among other things. After this incident, NCA tightened its security and provided staff training on how to protect themselves against online harassment.

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Opportunities

The outcomes of NCA efforts having garnered interest from UNFPA and WHO, NCA is currently engaged in setting up monitoring/research mechanisms for its work in Nigeria. These mechanisms are being established by adopting methods from a multi-country implementation research study on the design and delivery of CSE for out-of-school young people, led by UNFPA and WHO.

Materials and references

[NCA Comprehensive Sexuality Education Toolkit](#)

Addressing GBV among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar camp, Bangladesh

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Implemented by DanChurchAid from 2019 to 2023, co-financed by UN and Danida.

Overview

In Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee camp, DCA is a leading actor on combatting GBV by transforming gender norms in cooperation with religious leaders through a nexus approach. Women and men from host communities are included as agents of change and for strengthening contact between host communities and refugees. The project aims to fight discrimination on the basis of gender and provide critical services to women and girls in a refugee situation.

It is a complex setting, where terror groups try to convince local cultural and religious leaders not to cooperate with DCA, and there is generally a negative attitude towards International NGOs. Furthermore, the Rohingya refugee community is relatively conservative, and GBV is a taboo in the camps. However, by continuously striving to understand the community and address social norms, DCA has turned humanitarian support into a transformative process that challenges discriminatory gender norms.

Following engagement in dialogues and training which follows an Engaging Men as Accountable Partners (EMAP) approach, men and adolescent boys are changing attitudes and starting to share responsibilities for household chores. This EMAP approach brings the thoughts and voices of women into men's dialogue sessions. The dialogues look at addressing the challenges women face in the

communities; this helps to engage men as agents of change. Through this approach, women are engaged first, and then men and adolescent boys.

Using this methodology in the community was made possible through systematic dialogue with religious leaders, supported by DCA personnel, who developed own religious literacy and collected Quran references for informed conversation. This led to mutual trust building and eventually support by the religious leaders for the work of DCA. Another important area of the work is in sensitising other influential actors, such as camp coordinators, who are crucial partners in helping to reduce GBV in the camp. During the COVID-19 pandemic when international staff could not enter due to movement restrictions, religious leaders and EMAP members strongly supported continued efforts to prevent and address GBV.

Challenges

The challenges included a negative attitude towards international NGOs. Religious leaders and men were advising women not to go to the crisis centers. After DCA engaged the imams, they started encouraging women to seek service provisions and supporting follow-up on GBV cases.

Opportunities

The DCA approach is well recognised by donors. UN agencies and other organisations are referring cases to DCA. DCA is influential in case management in Cox's Bazar in both Rohingya and host communities. The 'magic ingredient' has been to engage with an overlooked community authority – the faith actors.

Materials and references

The case story above is case story 4.3 (page 17) in DCA's report 'Breaking the Silos'. See the full report with 5 other case stories [here](#).

Sustainable Women-led Solutions in Jordan

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Implemented by Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe Austria (DAA) in partnership with IOCC Jordan from 1 March 2024 to 31 August 2025 (18 months), co-financed by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

Overview

This project is primarily focused on integrating gender justice within a culturally sensitive framework, rather than treating it as an isolated objective. In the Jordanian context, women typically do not have male workers attend to their homes without the presence of male family members, significantly limiting their options, especially in fields traditionally dominated by men such as electricians, plumbers, and carpenters.

The project's main goal is to dismantle these barriers by empowering women through training in shelter maintenance and rehabilitation professions. This approach has a dual impact: it not only enables women to generate income but also addresses the broader community need for skilled female workers who can carry out essential repairs regardless of the presence of male family members. Moreover, by showcasing successful female role models in these professions, the project aims to challenge and transform prevailing gender biases within targeted communities of Jordanian society.

Challenges

This project inherently carries certain risks, particularly in its endeavour to shift the deeply

ingrained cultural norms of the target communities. A central risk revolves around garnering acceptance and support from the community. To address this risk, the project has embedded objectives regarding gender justice into a shelter rehabilitation strategy.

Opportunities

This project aims to address the self-reliance and independence of women while contributing to addressing the shelter shortages in targeted communities and enabling female-headed households to also have access to needed shelter repairs independently of the presence of other family members.

For further reference

- **Religion and gender in donor policies and practice. A reflection on government ministry and intergovernmental agency engagement with religious actors in pursuit of SDG 5.** Research report: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities by Dr. Elisabet Le Roux (*commissioned by DanChurchAid, Side by Side, Act Church of Sweden and Christian Aid and international religious actors*). This report includes recommendations for engagement from both donors and donor recipients in order to strengthen collaboration, evidence and results within work on gender equality in development cooperation. Available [here](#).
- **Scoping Study: Looking Back to Look Forward. The Role of Religious Actors in Gender Equality since the Beijing Declaration.** Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) by Dr. Nora Khalaf-Elledge (2021). Report on how religious actors have both contributed to and hindered gender equality since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. Available [here](#).
- **“The community trusts us.” Faith-based organizations’ role in advancing SRHR globally. A report from a multisectoral project** (*Act Church of Sweden, Diakonia, Islamic Relief, Pingstmissionens Utvecklingssamarbete (PMU), Karolinska Institutet*) (hard copies available or emilie.weiderud@svenskakyrkan.se)
- **When faith does violence: Reimagining engagement between churches and LGBTI groups on homophobia in Africa** (*Gerald West; Charlene van der Walt; Kapyra John Kaoma*). Available [here](#).
- **Faith leadership in civil society collaboration towards adoption of the EAC SRHR Bill (SOAW).** Available [here](#).
- **Colonizing African Values. How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa** (*Kapyra John Kaoma*). Report on the role of American Christian conservative groups in promoting anti-LGBT legislation in Uganda and other African countries. Available [here](#).
- **Strengthening Partnership with Faith Actors in Family Planning: A Strategic Planning Guide.** (*High Impact Practices in Family Planning (HIPs) Partnership, with contributions from ACT CoS and others*). The aim of this 2023 strategic planning guide is to help programme planners and decision-makers to engage and strengthen partnership with faith actors in family planning/SRHR, to identify and develop approaches to collaborate more effectively, openly, and transparently on family planning in each context. Available [here](#).
- **Advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights through faith-based approaches: A mapping study.** Conducted in 2014 by DSW, Faith to Action and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, this study presents some of the internal and external barriers that exist for faith-based organisations working on SRHR. Available [here](#).



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