Case study with Christian Aid as part of the
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'WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH FAITH LEADERS TO CHALLENGE HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES'

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List of abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome
CA	Christian Aid
CAAGI	Collective Action for Adolescent Girls Initiative
CBS	Contextual Bible Study
CEM	Child and Early Marriage
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practice
UK	United Kingdom
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches

1. Introduction

In 2016, the United Kingdom's (UK) Department for International Development released a call for proposals for a study entitled "Working effectively with faith leaders to challenge harmful traditional practices." A Consortium of the *Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities*, an international alliance examining the contribution of faith groups to community health and well-being, undertook this study to investigate best practices around engaging with faith leaders on harmful traditional practices (HTPs). This study is currently on-going and will continue until 2018.

The study itself follows a multi-case case study design, with each individual case study focusing on one of five organisations, four of whom are international faith-based organisations (FBOs), and their work on HTPs and with faith leaders. This document details the findings from the case study done with Christian Aid (CA).

2. Background

Christian Aid (CA) self-identifies as a Christian organisation working with people of all faiths and none. Its values are rooted in Christian beliefs, based on a relational theology approach. Founded in 1945 by English and Irish churches to resettle post-war European refugees, by the 1960s its focus had shifted to ending poverty around the world. It seeks to be part of a wider social movement that tackles inequalities, exposes the scandal of poverty and activates profound change, empowering people to challenge systems and structures that make and keep people poor. CA works through local partners, responding to their needs and contexts in 39 countries across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Middle East. In 2014, gender justice was placed at the centre of its organisational strategy, tied to its core focus on transforming poverty.[1]

In conducting this case study, nine people (five female, four male) were interviewed from various world regions. These participants were selected in consultation with the CA representative assigned to represent CA in the JLI Consortium conducting the study on faith leaders and harmful traditional practices. The research participants included:
- one senior gender policy advisor based in the UK
- one corporate gender champion based in the UK
- one violence and peace advisor based in Ireland
- one country manager based in Brazil (previously a gender programme officer)
- one senior programmes manager based in Zimbabwe
- one director of a CA partner organisation from Zimbabwe
- one senior programmes officer based in Nigeria
- one programme manager of a CA partner organisation from Nigeria
- one Baptist Christian faith leader and CA male gender champion from Nigeria

All participants are involved in current policy, programming and/or projects that engage with faith leaders on gender-based violence (GBV) and/or HTPs. These projects included:
- The *Collective Action for Adolescent Girls' Initiative (CAAGI)* in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria. The programme works on child and early marriage (CEM), to enable the education, reproductive health and economic empowerment of adolescent girls. The two-year pilot project began in April 2016 and builds on an innovative community methodology called GEADOR. Its main

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[1] From the self-administered *Selection questionnaire,* completed at request of this study's research leads. Also https://www.christianaid.org.uk/. Accessed July 10, 2017.

partners are the Interfaith Mediation Centre, Women Interfaith Council, Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria, Gender Awareness Trust and Development & Peace Initiative.

- The *Supporting Faith-Based Organisations to address Gender-Based Violence* project in Zimbabwe is a three-year pilot that began in 2017 in partnership with Padare Enkundleni Men's Forum and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (an alliance of 20 denominations) to transform church leaders, church structures and men around damaging social norms.
- The *Faith in Action: Promoting Gender Justice* in Sao Paulo, Brazil works with local partner Koinonia and established an (inter) Faith Network in 2013 on GBV support and prevention.
- The *Churches tackling gender inequality and promoting rights* project works across nine Brazilian dioceses (areas) in partnership with the Anglican Service of Diakonia and Development to improve GBV-related pastoral care, provide theological, GBV and advocacy resources for faith communities, and to coordinate a women's safe house.

The case study took a three-tier approach, focusing on one pilot project in Nigeria targeting CEM, then GBV programming in Zimbabwe and Brazil. The third level explored CA's organisational approach to HTPs and faith leaders. Aside from interviews, relevant CA documentation was reviewed. This allowed a better understanding of policy, programs and strategy. It included policy briefs, presentations, baseline studies, research and progress reports, theological toolkits, strategies and project proposals.

3. The existing evidence base

As CA chooses not to explicitly use an HTP lens, it does not have current programming or research solely focused on HTPs that also targets faith leaders. It does, however, have a history of engaging with faith leaders and communities on a range of community health issues including GBV, family planning and HIV & AIDS where HTPs are often cross-cutting themes. Many of these programs have been externally and internally evaluated. Feedback from programmes continues to shape CA's 2014 gender strategy with a revised update in 2017. CA supports local partners in contextual mapping studies to identify which approaches and issues may be appropriate, enabling reflection later.

Evidence around CEM in particular can be found in CA's detailed mapping study, using mixed methods, done in Kaduna, Nigeria in 2016. This was part of the *Adolescent Girls and Religion* project and used as a baseline that informed the design of the CAAGI pilot project. The study involved 57 key informant interviews and 47 focus group discussions with key informants, including faith and traditional leaders, as well as 1134 community questionnaires, with a report published in 2017.[2] The research found that religious teachings topped the list of factors influencing barriers to opportunity for girls here. A thin line was identified between religion and culture that needed addressing for religion to play a positive role in improving choices for girls. This informed the pilot's development and the annual reporting that has taken place to measure learnings and impact against the theory of change employed.[3]

Pilot projects in both Brazil and Zimbabwe are tackling discriminatory social norms within a context of GBV. Research documents that demonstrate early evidence-based success in these pilots can also offer a contribution to the HTP debate, for example academic research in 2016 by Roure and Capraro

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[2] *Religion and the Adolescent Girl: A formative study in Kaduna state*, 2017, Research Report, Christian Aid. This comprehensive mapping study provided a baseline for the subsequent CAAGI intervention. http://www.christianaid.org.uk/programme-policy-practice/sites/default/files/2017-01/Religion-girl-Kaduna-Nigeria-CAAGI-Christian-Aid-baseline-study-Jan2017.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.
[3] *In Our Lifetime CAAGI project*, 2017, Internal annual report, Christian Aid.

on the two CA Brazil projects,[4] and CA's 2017 external policy paper, *Gender-based violence in Zimbabwe: Faith leaders as agents of change.[5]* This research demonstrates a level of measurable success in engaging faith leaders around breaking silence on these issues, with indicators identified to demonstrate positive change. Academic documentation of contextual bible study [CBS] methodology, a technique employed by Christian Aid in many countries, also offers some evidence as to its transformational effectiveness in grassroots setting within the African continent in particular.[6]

Some documentation exists of project-based good practice models and impact around tackling GBV and/or CEM, for example documents produced by the CAAGI project in Nigeria.[7] However, all four pilot projects examined for this study are recent and are deemed experimental. Detailed independent research is still required with regard to their longer-term tracking and endline studies.

CA's experiences working with faith leaders more widely also offer a range of documented evidence. Selected examples with some HTP relevance include the *Faith Leaders and Family Planning* external research report, done across Nigeria, Burundi and Kenya.[8] Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were done with 90 participants, including both Muslim and Christian faith leaders. Research findings noted that a key barrier for faith leaders on this issue was a lack of scriptural theology to support family planning, but also noted possibilities around a willingness to develop these.

CA's years of experience on engaging faith leaders around HIV has shaped their work in other areas. The *Evaluation of the impact of Christian Aid's support of faith-based responses to HIV[9]* across Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa, documents good practices such as the SAVE model and contains lessons which can maybe assist in HTP engagement. This includes, for example, the need to work conversationally (not confrontationally) and the distinctive role which faith leaders can play on these issues due to their influence at community level. The value of approaches that use faith-based sources was noted and the bridge-building role of international FBOs. Workshop consultations[10] for the global faith movement for gender justice (Side by Side) in 2014 involving 27 international FBOs, highlighted current barriers to faith leader engagement. As a result, a strategic plan and draft theory of change on faith and gender has been developed, with continuous evaluation planned in the light of practice.

However, it is noted that to date, in relation to the projects examined, CA has tended to document its project successes on a case by case basis, rather than synthesising evidence of success across multiple regions. Nevertheless, its 2015 *Social Norms Paper[11]* arguably offers one important example of a synthesised internal policy contribution to the wider HTP debate.

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[4] De Roure S. & Capraro C. 2016. *Faith paths to overcome violence against women and girls in Brazil,* Gender and Development, 24: 2, 205-218. http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/faith-paths-to-overcome-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-brazil-617017. Accessed July 13, 2017.

[5] *Gender-based violence in Zimbabwe: Faith leaders as agents of change.* Internal document, Christian Aid.

[6] West G. & Zondi-Mabezele P. 2004. "The Bible story that became a campaign. The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and beyond). *Ministerial Formation. Also Just Scripture. 2011.* Internal document, Christian Aid. http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Files/the%20bible%20story.pdf Accessed July 13, 2017.

[7] *Raising male champions for change: A CAAGI story of change.* 2017, Good practices document, Christian Aid. https://jliflc.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/male-champions_v2.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.
Also *Building collective action through social dialogue, A CAAGI story of change*, 2017, Good practices document, Christian Aid. https://collectiveactionforgirls.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/social-dialogue_casestudy.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.

[8] Walker C. *Faith Leaders and Family Planning*, Internal and external research report [nd], Christian Aid. http://programme.christianaid.org.uk/programme-policy-practice/sites/default/files/2017-04/Faith%20Leaders%20and%20Family%20Planning%20Report%20-%20Final%20draft.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.

[9] *Evaluation of the impact of Christian Aid's support of faith-based responses to HIV,* Internal and External Evaluation report [date tbc], Christian Aid. http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/evaluation-of-the-impact-of-Christian-Aids-support-of-faith-based-responses-to-HIV.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.

[10] *Communiqué: outcomes of an international workshop for strengthening the global faith movement for gender justice.* Internal document, Christian Aid.

[11] *Social Norms Paper*. 2015. Internal policy paper, Christian Aid.

4. Christian Aid's approach to faith leaders and HTPs

CA has long-term experiences working with faith leaders globally as a main strategy and believes that local faith communities have an important role to play in tackling the roots of poverty. Its theory of change revolves around the idea of 'being the change you want to see in the world', requiring attitudinal and behavioural shifts from partners, faith leaders and communities, as well as changes in policies and structures.[12] This shapes CA's approach to gender justice, HTPs and faith leaders. CA is currently developing a working definition of the term 'faith leader' in collaboration with its Side by Side partners.

CA builds a transformational, rather than a transactional, relationship with its faith-based partners, that includes a process of values alignment and working sustainably together for long-term behaviour change. It notes the importance of analysing the levels of individual change within faith leaders over time, seen as a process rather than a one-off event, where shifts at each level denote progress and need to be monitored in themselves. Understanding the theological underpinnings for gender in/justice becomes an essential driver of sustainable change for faith leader transformation. This approach requires theological alignment, where sacred texts are directly and respectfully engaged, often by drawing in recognised scriptural experts to help build gender-aware interpretations. Faith leaders can then hold to these with integrity and confidence as they work in communities:

> *Faith is often a strong part of what shapes the meaning and understanding of gender. Thus faith, and its theological underpinning, must be part of the discussion and the practice of change…. theology is vital to the task of challenging injustice and seeking renewal.*[1]

As a result, faith leaders are not merely seen as an instrumental access point to communities, but as sustainable catalysts of change at community level, with trust, authority and credibility as well as wider networks and permanent structures. In recent years, CA has shifted from supporting isolated church interventions to building collaborative networks and engaging wider stakeholders and referral systems, as well as employing a stronger, more explicit interfaith lens. This is based on an increased understanding of how faith acts as a powerful motivator for transformational change, both in terms of individual and social behaviour and action, with household, community and public arenas noted.

CA tends to place HTPs under its gender and health work, as a cross-cutting issue that falls predominantly within its community health framework.[13] However, all CA staff noted that HTPs are not explicitly used as a primary programming or policy lens. Instead, 'tackling discriminatory social norms' is the preferred term used within a positive framework of building equitable social norms identified as an essential part of realising gender justice for all, defined in CA's strategic document *Gender Justice: Achieving equitable power relations for all*.[14] This takes an intersectional approach to building equitable, resilient, thriving societies where gender injustice has been overcome and mutually

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[12] Jacob, July 4, 2017. See also Christian Aid's draft *Theory of Change* on faith leaders and gender. Found in *Side by Side Strategic Plan 2016-2021.* 2015. Internal strategy document, Christian Aid.

[13] *Community Health: Christian Aid's approach*. 2013. External policy brief, Christian Aid. http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/Community-health-Christian-Aid-approach-December-2013.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.

[14] *Gender Justice: Achieving just and equitable relations for all.* 2017 update. External strategic document, Christian Aid. http://www.christianaid.org.uk/programme-policy-practice/sites/default/files/2017-02/Christian-Aid-Gender-Justice-Strategy-Feb2017.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017. This strategy moves away from gender binaries to consider gender identities as on a spectrum. Whilst its main focus remains on challenging patriarchy and relations between men and women, a broadened understanding of gender explicitly reshapes their language, vision and programming around 'gender justice for all'.

empowering relationships exist. While the term 'HTP' is at times used at policy level,[15] there is a wariness about prescribing what this entails:

> *Christian Aid does not have a prescriptive definition of HTP. This is because we work across a number of different countries and regions where this manifests differently. However, more broadly, we consider that HTPs are practices grounded in culture, religion and tradition that violate women and girls' rights. Such practices are widespread, causing suffering, humiliation and the marginalization of women and girls.[16]*

CA is generally highly uncomfortable with the term 'harmful traditional practice', finding it limiting in various ways:

> *There's ones where we'll be able to say yes, so FGM/cutting, we would consider that for sure an HTP, but then things like enforcement with the threat of violence of women in a domestic sphere, is that an HTP? …it seems almost so widespread that we couldn't consider it there. So the parameters of HTPs, they probably fade away into the much bigger issues of gender equality at one end. I think it's an interesting term. Definitely the 'traditional' bit gives the impression that these practices aren't associated with a modern state…I think CA would raise questions about that, because some practices like early marriage, I don't think they're necessarily that distant from what is a* de facto *accepted state-sanctioned practice.[17]*

Multiple participants at policy, programme, partner and community level raised specific concerns about both the word 'harmful' and the word 'traditional', as these words are often detrimental to attempts to engage with communities or mobilise faith leaders around specific practices.

On probing CA's decision not to use a an TP lens, policy respondents also noted that HTPs are typically seen too narrowly, often connected to one specific practice or only one region.[18] Thus CA suggests including elements of GBV and looking at HTPs as a subset of GBV, although it was also noted that some HTPs were not violence-related, e.g. leadership participation of women. CA in any case prefers to use a more positive approach, one emphasising improving rights, choices and opportunities. For example, in Nigeria, even though CEM is a focus, the project is framed as 'increasing education for adolescent girls.'[19] An HTP lens can focus on the negative, making communities defensive and creating a backlash. It can also be associated with colonialism and Western values, mitigating against CA's commitment to respect and understand other traditions and cultures. Framing something as a HTP at project level could fence an issue off or close down conversations. Opening the space up to talk about negative social norms, harmful masculinities or practices discriminatory towards women and girls is done instead.[20] CA uses the preferred term 'discriminatory/inequitable social norms':

> *The following are some social norms Christian Aid and our partners are addressing in our work: utilisation of traditional birth attendants instead of health facilities by pregnant women, female genital mutilation, witchcraft and traditional healers, stigma, early marriage. CA's community health approach is comprised of three strands, equitable institutions, equitable social norms and approach to health services development.[21]*

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[15] For example, see *Social Norms Paper*, 2015. Internal policy paper, Christian Aid.
[16] From the self-administered *Selection questionnaire,* completed at request of this study's research leads.
[17] Cheryl, June 30, 2017.
[18] Susie, July 6, 2017.
[19] Tammy, June 23, 2017. Also *in their Lifetime, CAAGI Project.* 2015. Internal proposal, Christian Aid.
[20] Jacob, July 4, 2017.
[21] *Social Norms Paper*. 2015. Internal policy paper, Christian Aid.

The discourse of rights and, at times, of gender inequality was often seen as more effective than labelling practices as inherently harmful and/or traditional.[22] HTPs were instead seen by CA as implicit cross-cutting issues, emerging across multiple programme areas:

> So the way we view HTPs is like they cut across all our programme areas, like early marriage, child marriage, practices that prohibit certain people from certain services or from participating in public domain, are widespread and we recognise that across our programme areas. Whether we are doing governance or humanitarian, we integrate different approaches to address HTPs in our programme, such as practices that affect people's rights to access healthcare services, or social norms and practices that exclude people, especially women and girls from participating in decision-making structures, both at home, community and even at state levels.[23]

Lastly, aside from the HTPs focused on in this study, programme respondents identified a number of additional practices (from their diverse contexts) that could be labelled the same way. These included labia elongation, female submission and male domination in marriage leading to intimate partner violence or rape, forced marrying of pregnant girls, lack of participation by females in decision-making structures, discriminatory widowhood, witchcraft, inheritance and education practices, taboos on faith leaders discussing sex, male polygamy/infidelity, husbands maintaining a second family ('small houses'), practices whereby a man is socially allowed to 'flirt' with the younger sisters or cousins of his wife where sex and pregnancy can ensue, patriarchy, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights like family planning, dowry, and stereotypes of black women as hypersexual.

5. The role of faith, faith communities and faith leaders in relation to HTPs

Faith was seen by all respondents as playing a role in HTPs and in the discriminatory social norms that underpin them. While it is rarely the main cause, it is often used as a justificatory or reinforcing factor with a 'thin line' noted between the entangled spaces of religion and culture. This can stifle reporting of such practices to legal or other support structures outside the faith institution. Furthermore, religion can reinforce cultural traditions and even condone or encourage it. Proponents of harmful practices can often hide behind religion and, in African contexts especially, some faith leaders are also traditional leaders, further blurring this distinction between religion and culture. Many faith leaders struggle to differentiate between cultural and religious teachings; "The most common barrier for faith leaders is the overlap between faith teachings and deeply rooted cultural practices or traditions that make it difficult to clearly assign certain behaviours to the influence of one or the other."[24]

Faith leaders are still frequently seen as reinforcing negative gender practices directly, being a barrier to change or remaining silent and inactive. Pre-pilot studies in Zimbabwe and Nigeria identified failures to distinguish between culture and faith as fuelling GBV, where (for example) Christian women were measured by cultural standards on practices such as labia elongation. Husbands could complain to their pastors about this, who disciplined the woman for not being a good wife in the eyes of God:[25]

> For example, the position of the woman within a marriage. Some men when they get married, they think that their wife's position is at par with that of children, so women must be submissive within a marriage and must take instructions from their husband…that's what tradition is saying. Most

[22] Cheryl, June 29, 2017.
[23] Tammy, June 23, 2017.
[24] *Religion and the Adolescent Girl,* 2017. External Research Report, Christian Aid.
[25] *Findings from Women Leaders Consultative Meeting*, Zimbabwe 2015. Internal document, Christian Aid.

> *religious officials, when they marry people they are quick to support that position, so that takes away the agency of women as well.[26]*

However, research participants also saw potential for faith leaders to be influential in countering practices and beliefs that are harmful to people. It was noted that faith leaders can potentially play a significant role over time in ensuring improved implementation of progressive national gender and child laws present in all three of the countries surveyed in this study.[27] This is currently lacking, due to the persistence of prevailing harmful social norms. Faith leaders can be catalysts for institutional, community and household change, helping communities and families move away from discriminatory social norms and towards equitable ones. Transforming faith leaders themselves over a longer-term process was critical to realising this aim.

CA notes that if faith leaders are to play a transforming role in HTPs, they need to shift from solely a pastoral role in helping those individuals affected, to also a prophetic role of rooted advocacy that works at family, community and societal level to promote prevention, hold perpetrators accountable, and engage at policy level. These four levels of influence are detailed in CA's Side by Side Strategic Plan 2016-2021.[28] By offering multi-level interaction, CA can work with multiple faith leaders at different stages of the process of transformation to have a positive impact. Part of the problem is that many faith leaders have often had limited theological education, meaning that they preach and interpret sacred scripture on the basis of very little knowledge and narrow experiences. Nevertheless, CA activities in Brazil suggest that the historical tradition of 'diakonia', where church members and leaders are equipped to serve or help the world in social ways as a core part of their faith commitment, can and is being creatively reimagined in relation to GBV.[29] CA's project activities within Africa suggest that sacred scripture is also being reinterpreted in creative ways.[30] To help reshape faith leader engagement from complicit to transformational, CA develops and uses interfaith toolkits,[31] liturgical booklets[32] and contextual bible studies that draw on CA's organisation-wide theology of gender.[33]

Despite these activities, CA suggests that the potential that faith leaders have to tackle the roots of gender inequality has still to be fully enabled. Documentation from pilot projects such as *Raising male champions for change: A CAAGI story of change* in Nigeria,[34] *Building collective action through social dialogue, A CAAGI story of change in Nigeria[35]*, *Southern Bahia Rural workers and quilombolas breaking the silence of violence against women* in Brazil,[36] and *Gender-based violence in Zimbabwe: Faith leaders as agents of change* in Zimbabwe[37] arguably demonstrate the roles they might play.

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[26] William, June 30, 2017.

[27] These include the *Anti-Domestic Violence Act*, 2007, Zimbabwe, the domestication of the *Child Right Act* in Kaduna State, Nigeria and the *2006 Maria da Penha Law on Domestic and Family Violence* in Brazil.

[28] *Side by Side Strategic Plan 2016-2021.* 2015. Internal strategy document, Christian Aid.

[29] Susie, June 30, 2017.

[30] Sandra, June 23, 2017.

[31] *Improving the choices and opportunities for Adolescent Girls; A toolkit for faith leaders*. 2017, Christian Aid.

[32] *The prevention & tackling of GBV against women*. 2013. Anglican Services for Diakonia and Development.

[33] *Of the Same Flesh: Exploring a Theology of Gender*, 2014. External policy document, Christian Aid. https://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/of-the-same-flesh-gender-theology-report.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.

[34] *Raising male champions for adolescent girls. A CAAGI story of change*. 2017. External good practice document, Christian Aid.

[35] *Building collective action through social dialogue: A CAAGI story of change*, 2017. External good practice document, Christian Aid.

[36] *Southern Bahia Rural workers and quilombolas breaking the silence of violence against women*. 2014. External good practices document, Christian Aid. http://koinonia.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/koinonia.fw2_good-practices-june20141.pdf. Accessed July 13, 2017.

[37] *Gender-based violence in Zimbabwe: Faith leaders as agents of change*. (date tbc) Internal good practices document, Christian Aid.

6. Interlocutors

Unsurprisingly, CA sees faith leaders as frequently the best interlocutors with significant but underutilised potential in many community settings. They are trusted and authoritative, people already turn to them on many issues, they are invested in the community, they know the context, and their structures are permanent. Faith leaders have access to wider networks and structures for systemic replication/dissemination of information. If people believe that HTPs are religiously required or legitimated, credible and transformed faith leaders can play an authoritative role to challenge this. Some faith communities can also be quite closed communities, only accessible through their leaders:

> So the society trust them a lot. If you're talking about behaviour changes it means they are not deceiving the people. The people will tend to go with them. They are well positioned as a catalyst for this type of change that we want to see in our society. [38]

Due to the complex entanglement of religion and culture, CA also identifies traditional leaders as potentially important change agents, seen from below as experts on culture. Their positions as custodians of culture allows them to speak about and require changes and it is important not to ignore or bypass their role as existing interlocutors for many community members.

Local experts around health, masculinity and theology can act as important interlocutors to faith leaders themselves, enabling faith leaders to be better informed about the consequences and impact of harmful practices. These interlocutors also allow the international FBO to remain in the background as an invisible convenor of the visible conversation space at local level.

Lastly, survivors of harmful practices, or those affected by harmful practices, can be powerful interlocutors. Opening space for the voices of those directly affected, so that they can share their experiences, is seen as essential for the transformation of wider social relationships. Safe space models like GEADOR in Nigeria employ this as a key step and are discussed further in the next section. However, CA has suggested that these voices should not be the main interlocutors as this can place undue pressure on survivors, who often also occupy marginal positions within society. [39]

7. Safe spaces for discussing HTPs

CA research participants consistently emphasised the importance of small group discussion groups involving faith leaders. These open up spaces for conversation and have a conflict-sensitive approach to building consensus that seek to do no harm and avoid direct confrontation. Age and gender segregated groups and same-sex facilitators are important, especially in African contexts, where there are taboos on speaking about certain issues inter-generationally or cross-gender. Yet it was recommended that, while participants first meet in age and gender specific groups, they also need structured forums to come together in mixed groups for 'active listening'. This was seen as crucial to the transformation of faith leaders. The community-based GEADOR circle model in Nigeria was identified as an innovative safe-space approach that utilised this model,[40] where adolescent girls, boys, men and women first met separately and then as a larger facilitated group, where each group then spoke out about their experiences. This took place at both community and state level and enabled, for example, girls to influence policy makers from below. It was recommended that in these spaces, specific HTP issues were left to emerge from within the community and that the international partner took a back seat to local groups, avoiding the danger that these issues are seen as 'western'.

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[38] Tammy, June 23, 2017.
[39] Sally, July 6, 2017.
[40] *Building collective action through social dialogue: A CAAGI story of change*, 2017. External good practices document, Christian Aid.

In creating spaces, it is important to ensure that, in these single-sex or mixed groups sessions, men do not view the issue under discussion as only a women's issue, or dismiss it as women 'taking over' or speaking out of their place. A way of overcoming these obstacles is by using progressive men's organisations to engage with (male) faith leaders. However, it was noted that these men's groups also need to liaise with women's groups to ensure shared messaging. Furthermore, men's retreats or groups run internally by churches may require external facilitation, otherwise they can reinforce (and not challenge) patriarchal attitudes and behaviours.

Developing good, contextual theological materials from credible sources to inform these small group discussions, was identified as critically important for transforming attitudes. Theological toolkits offer accessible methodological tools for small groups, and contextual bible study approaches, such as the Tamar Campaign on sexual violence,[41] can allow multiple voices to be heard. These materials help to shape a safe theological space that can begin to assist communities to break the silence on these issues within faith spaces.

It is important to also create safe spaces for survivors of harmful practices. Firstly, there is a need for safe reporting spaces within faith community structures, where experiences and reporting of abuse is kept confidential. The point was made in Zimbabwe that women consistently underreport and stay silent, because they are afraid that the pastor might reveal the issue in his sermon and shame them.[42] Secondly, one also has to ensure that community discussion groups are sensitive to the possibility that a survivor might be taking part in the group. With HTPs, there was a need to remain aware of the risks taken by participants to engage or attend, and the potential danger of re-traumatisation when a participant may learn that something is a HTP, where before that they did not see it as such. Finally, there is a need for referrals to safe women-only spaces, shelters and victim-friendly police stations. Discussions may lead to disclosure and need safe referral, and spaces need to take this into account.

8. Approaches

A two-pronged approach to faith communities was highlighted as effective, with involvement of both non-ordained and ordained persons both at institutional (top) level and at community (bottom) level. CA has often in the past had more of a top-down approach to faith leaders, but new pilots are also enabling bottom-up models and methodologies to enable this multi-level engagement:

> *There can be quite localised interpretations of faith…you can't just convert senior faith leaders [to the cause of addressing GBV] and then that will automatically trickle down. A top-down and bottom-up approach is needed.[43]*

CA has learnt, especially through their GBV programming, that faith leaders need support on their own journey of change, to then be able to engage constructively with their faith communities and members on these sensitive issues. This avoids a defensive and arguably counter-productive response from faith leaders if religious tradition overall is blamed as the sole cause. A conversational, rather than a confrontational, approach is typically used. Involving faith leaders in framing the issues under discussion in a certain way and allowing them to advocate 'for' something is an important part of supporting faith leaders. Framing programme goals and language inspirationally around long-term rights and opportunities, rather than merely fighting against specific practices, offers a 'champion'

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[41] West G & Zondi-Mabezele P. 2004. "The Bible story that became a campaign. The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and beyond)". *Ministerial Formation*.
[42] *Findings from Women Leaders Consultative Meeting*, Zimbabwe 2015. Internal document, Christian Aid.
[43] Cheryl, June 29, 2017.

identity for both male and female faith leaders to embody, recognising that the precepts of their faith mandate them to address these issues.

Places and opportunities for exposure and education of faith leaders, away from congregants, were recommended as important strategies to build faith leaders' capacity and to challenge the confusion of tradition and religion, especially when faith leaders are also traditional leaders. Such venues could be 'summer schools' for faith leaders, where they can meet peers and continue learning through mentoring. These offer a space to share questions, concerns and doubts in ways that faith leaders often do not want to do in front of their congregations' due to a fear of losing authority. Another recommendation was including gender in the curricula at theological training colleges, where there is direct theological engagement with the patriarchal ideologies that underpin HTPs. This was noted as an essential and effective way of bringing about a shift in perspective, a common mind-set, and enabling teaching and understanding backed by scriptures:

> …[I]f you come to help them understand that no, these practices are not right but are harmful, these practices cannot be bound by scripture, it will take a long time…[W]e walk with religious leaders by helping them improve their capacity so that they change from what they thought was right before, to something that they can now see.[44]

Building national and regional faith leader networks on gender was identified as an effective approach to engage faith leaders in a safe way at a senior level. Dialogue Forums such as the (inter) Faith Actors Dialogue Forum in Nigeria, the (inter) Faith Network in Brazil, and the Gender Faith Network in Zimbabwe were all seen as having mobilising and scaling impact for change.[45] These new forums enabled progressive faith leaders to build shared momentum and credibility, develop rooted advocacy strategies, influence conservative peers, and engage with policy at community, state and regional level.

Involving men was noted as an important step forwards from earlier women's empowerment only models, and a key new approach for the organisation. The majority of faith leaders remain men and offering them a positive role as gender champions has shown early successes. Working with them in small, single-sex groups, as well as through masculinities organisations, has proven to be an effective mode of engagement to date.

> It's okay to tell women about their rights, it's great to get them out there demanding them, but unless we also address the men we're really not going to achieve much change… what's the motivation for men continuing to be perpetrators, how do we start to undo the socialisation, the sense of entitlement men have, how do we get them to be on the side of women's rights…to defend, to support, to protect women? How do we get men more involved?[46]

As noted earlier, CA's approach for gender justice uses a power lens to interrogate gender and to tie it into other social injustices, to go to the roots of the unchallenged assumptions that may cause HTPs to thrive. By working to understand and transform underlying unjust power relations, CA focuses less on tackling practices and more strategically on shifting the social norms that underpin them:

> It is unjust power relations at the heart of it, and not just the gender stuff. But it's these invisible dimensions of power, such as social norms, which we feel has been that which has been most neglected, not just across gender, but across the whole range of issues.[47]

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[44] Joseph, June 30, 2017.
[45] See *Gender Faith Network, Zimbabwe*, 2015, Internal powerpoint presentation, Christian Aid.
[46] Sandra, June 23, 2017.
[47] Jacob, July 4,2017.

9. Partnerships

CA differentiates between two forms of partnership, namely transformational and transactional. In their work with faith leaders and FBOs they seek the former, where a key prerequisite is the alignment of values. Local faith partners also reiterated this as important and pointed to the importance of holding core values in common, such as human dignity.[48] For CA the transformational partnership is preferred:

> *Christian Aid has these two ways of thinking about partnerships…the transactional partnership where we just work together on something, and…transformational partnership. This is the more powerful one and especially with faith partners is the one we try to be aiming at where you both really know each other as partners rather than just picking a problem and just joining forces.[49]*

Second, in its work with faith leaders on gender justice, CA is moving away from isolated siloed church interventions, towards partnership with, and development of, embedded faith networks at country, regional and global levels. Partnering with existing networks like the Christian Association of Nigeria, as well as developing networks, such as the inter/faith networks on gender in Brazil and Zimbabwe, offer mentoring platforms for transformational engagement of faith leaders. This multi-denominational and interfaith reach gives credibility to CA's work, enables easier replication, and avoids charges of promoting religious intolerance. Their Side by Side partnership mentioned earlier develops a global faith network on gender to enable further sharing and organisational co-operation.[50] Use of social media also helps these networks function and share resources, as well as drip-feed ideas into popular consciousness. This is especially effective in engaging youth, and may play a role to counter the co-optation of media spaces by conservative faith voices.

Third, CA formally partners with theological experts and local scriptural scholars from the World Council of Churches, for example Ezra Chitando[51] in Zimbabwe. This is an important part of ensuring credibility of the grassroots materials developed to build a shared theological vision that different denominations can support. They plan to partner directly with the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) theological colleges, to mainstream theological materials around gender into existing pastor training programs for sustainability. Creative methodologies, such as contextual bible studies, help move away from single voice narrative to multiplicity of interpretations, offering ways for ordinary people of faith to critically engage and learn.

Finally, formally partnering with men's organisations such as Padare in Zimbabwe and/or with masculinities experts is helping to raise awareness of the role of men, build the constructive capacity of male faith leaders and male faith actors and help to locate men better as potential actors for positive change within the HTP arena.

10. Challenges and opportunities

Many of the issues around addressing HTPs with faith communities and faith leaders have been identified in the preceding sections. This section will briefly bullet what has been identified as key opportunities and challenges.

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[48] Edward, June 30, 2017.
[49] Cheryl. June 29, 2017.
[50] See *Side by Side Strategy 2016-2021*, Internal powerpoint presentation, Christian Aid. *Side by Side Strategic Plan 2016-2021.* 2015. Internal strategic document, Christian Aid.
[51] Professor Ezra Chitando (PhD) is a theology consultant on HIV/AIDS for the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa, a programme of the World Council of Churches.

Challenges:

- Creating institutional accountability at congregation level. Harmful practices remain under-reported or are kept internal. Clergy can be complicit in practices, involved in violation of congregants, or reinforcing negative gender practices and stereotypes.
- Tackling the complicity and silence of ordinary men and women in communities around perpetuating HTPs. Women in particular can bear the brunt of the social cost of refusing to accede to HTPs. This requires viable alternatives to these existing status symbols to be developed and accepted by communities.
- Transformed faith leaders can remain a progressive minority, even seen as comical or deviant by the wider community. The majority of faith leaders have not yet made this shift and still hold a middle ground position that does not explicitly either condone or condemn practices.
- It has been particularly hard to engage with certain Pentecostal denominations, as many of their faith leaders are publically and even politically lobbying against progressive gender laws. This was noted by CA interviewees in Brazil, Nigeria and Zimbabwe and is also reinforced by academic research on examples within the wider Brazilian context in 2016.[52]
- Choosing to work collaboratively with faith leaders may at times be hampered or even halted by certain (patriarchal) beliefs that these faith leaders may feel are an inherent and non-negotiable dimension of their faith e.g. women not being allowed to represent God at the communion table, or certain aspects of sexual and reproductive health rights.
- Some faith leaders do not want to address HTPs at all, for it may lead to resistance from the communities that they serve and that may be paying their salaries.
- Finding a space for global faith and gender discussions. Policy level interviewees at CA noted that much of current mainstream women's rights discourse still often sits uncomfortably with questions of faith. They note that this may mean that faith leaders can remain excluded from these wider global conversations on gender.[53]

Opportunities:

- Faith leaders often hold normative authority and can, once they have reshaped their own views, help their wider communities to shift sustainably around gender issues, facilitating the development of new norms around gendered patterns of behaviour.
- Structured opportunities exist with theological training institutions to mainstream resources into the regular training process of new pastors. This can sustainably reshape the wider system and significantly scale up the impact on and by faith leaders.
- When local communities see successful projects on these issues in other communities, they become more open to engaging with the issue.
- Increased global momentum linking faith and gender has developed regional structures which drives scalable change at multiple levels, utilising social media for easier sharing across denominations and countries.
- New laws around GBV and/or child rights have been passed in all three countries explored in this study. These legal changes offer opportunities for engaging with faith leaders around assisting in implementing and understanding these laws at community level.

11. What works?

Based on participants' interviews as well as document review, practices can be identified that are conducive to addressing HTPs and/or working with faith leaders. These are briefly listed below:

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[52] De Roure S & Capraro C. 2016. *Faith paths to overcome violence against women and girls in Brazil*, Gender and Development, 24:2, 209.
[53] Sally, July 6, 2017.

- Using credible and senior faith leaders to model, champion alternatives and challenge community beliefs that HTPs are condoned or required by religion, and to verbalise and explain the project in ways that open conversations. While expecting all faith leaders to get on board is unrealistic, 'male champion' faith leader approaches have shown some early success in some African pilots.
- Using a dual approach, by both engaging with senior religious hierarchies to work down, but also with grassroots interventions that hold open space for diverse ordinary faith voices to engage from below.
- Shifting from isolated interventions to developing faith networks and peer sharing as an effective way to replicate and mainstream, that can draw on social media. Context is key and peer-to-peer learning, whilst a longer-term strategy, can assist in preventing a conservative backlash from taking place.
- Employing toolkits with scriptural engagement are an important way of engaging with faith. Involving multiple denominations/faiths in the development and roll-out of such toolkits is important, so that it does not become seen as the sole property of one group or denomination, enabling other denominations to opt out of any engagement or creating divisions.
- Creating small discussion groups separated by gender/age and facilitated by a same-sex individual is very important. But so is also coming together as different age groups and genders, in facilitated structured forums, to listen to and learn from each other.
- The experiences of those affected by a harmful practice, voiced by these individuals themselves, can play a key role in dialogues for grassroots change, as can the voices of changed perpetrators.
- Engaging in a community mapping process first avoids top-down programming to offer a contextual response to local partner-identified issues.[54] Having faith leaders and/or the community involved in identifying the HTPs to be addressed improves relevance and ownership.
- Historicising individual practices, understanding where their specific impetus comes from, and how they became linked into faith, helps guide how to engage with faith and traditional leaders.
- Interdenominational and/or interfaith theological resources engage multiple voices and offer a shared space and platform around which to build consensus.
- Transforming faith leaders must be viewed as an ongoing process and not a one-off event. This enables gradual evolution to take place and for gains in the right direction to be measured each step of the way.

12. Conclusions

CA insists on the importance of engaging directly with faith leaders if sustainable change is to happen within multiple realms of power in society. However, it also acknowledges that many faith leaders currently remain a problematic voice on both HTPs and wider GBV. Tackling this ambivalence requires a constructive approach that amplifies progressive voices so they are not drowned out by conservative voices, but also requires discussion that includes, and not excludes, more conservative voices. Faith leaders need 'safe spaces' to first reshape their own attitudes if they are to become effective change agents in their communities. This requires engagement with a process of internal theological legitimacy, enabling faith leaders to be motivated to take positive action on this issue as mandated by and in line with their faith tradition.

CA has significant long-term experience of working with faith leaders in a process of transformational engagement around discriminatory social norms in multiple contexts. They are applying this experience to pioneer collaborative strategies in contexts where HTPs of various kinds are prevalent. Their response has not been to focus on directly tackling negative HTPs from the top down, but to help local faith partners apply a relational power lens within multiple realms of influence. This looks

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[54] *Findings from Women Leaders Consultative Meeting*, Zimbabwe 2015. Internal document, Christian Aid.

beyond visible practices, to surface and reshape ideologies that justify and legitimise the unjust power relations that fuel or enable the continuation of these practices. CA's experience suggests that if faith leaders themselves can authentically reimagine their own faith tradition in relation to gender justice, they can then have significant influence in communities. CA builds the capacity of local FBO partners on gender and/or HTP awareness, helping them develop contextual resources, often through network structures, for constructive discussions about discriminatory social norms. Creative methodologies that open spaces for diverse voices have been important, as has the convening of multi-level faith networks for replication.

Giving faith leaders something to stand for, rather than merely against, offers a positive identity to embrace as a core aspect of their faith, and invites them to make a positive contribution to the wider global debate. This can take them beyond interventions that assist only individual victims, to also engaging systemically with household and community structures and norms, as well as helping to shape progressive public policies and structures both within and outside faith institutions. The employment of multiple traditional religious categories such as pastoral care (helping victims) and prophetic action (speaking out to law and policy makers and faith institutions on structural change) may help faith leaders feel their traditions are not merely being denounced as a whole, but can be creatively transformed.