Gender Faith Network

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What is the GFN

- A network of three organisations, concerned about gender inequality and based violence and the role of the faith sector: ZCC, Padare and CA
- Padare Men’s Forum, targeting men and boys to promote gender justice
- Officially Launched on the 1st of July 2015
- Aims to support all faiths to increase capacity to address gender inequality and gender based violence.
- Currently engaging with the Christian faith only as a starting point
Aims of the GFN

The aim of the network is to:

- Provide tailor made technical capacity building in developing policies and programmes for faith leaders, including becoming an active part of the referral system.
- Support Theological colleges to develop curriculum for gender and gender based violence.
- Engage in advocacy with duty bearers for implementation of laws addressing gender based violence.
- Become a source of information and resources for churches who wish to develop gender and gender based violence policies and programmes.
Why did the Zim programme decide to engage faith leaders?

Zim programme already had the experience of engaging with churches on peace building and conflict transformation, extractives governance.

Churches in Zim occupy a fairly safe space to challenge deep seated systems and structures and to do advocacy work, they have the legitimacy, clout and influence required.

BUT...

Churches perceived as “reinforcing “ some negative gender practices and stereotypes.

Increasing reports of faith leaders being involved in cases of sexual and emotional violence of congregants.

Churches seen as the last frontier in terms of gender inequality.

Vast majority of church leaders are male and yet vast majority of congregants are female.
What informed the decision to start with GBV

GBV is a pertinent issue in the context- high prevalence yet Christian constitute the vast majority of Zimbabweans – more than 80% (http://relzim.org/)

Zim programme’s livelihoods and governance work was being impacted negatively by GBV and therefore needed innovative approaches to respond to it

The faith sector seen as part of the solution but also part of the problem of gender inequality e.g. early marriages, reinforcing gender stereotypes

There is significant under reporting of GBV due to several reasons including economic, socio-cultural and religious concerns and beliefs.

a law addressing domestic violence was passed in 2007 and the Police have made provisions for a Victim Friendly Unit to be established in order to assist survivors of violence. The voice of the faith sector in engaging with the law and advocating for its effective implementation was not very evident.
Why start with GBV?

- GBV cuts across all themes and is therefore a unifying challenge for most stakeholders and communities.
- Faith sector is uniquely positioned as a mobilization platform against gender-based violence.
- The structures present in the faith sector appeal to all the different age groups, genders, ethnicities and classes of people, thereby providing a captive audience for a message on gender-based violence.
- Core unit of the church is the family, in which many cases of violence occur, thereby giving the church a moral mandate to address gender-based violence for the sake of the continued survival and relevance of the church.
- Although the majority of congregants are women, most church leaders are male and therefore the representation of women’s concerns on gender-based violence tends to be minimized.
- There is a culture of silence when it comes to addressing gender-based violence issues in the church. This means there is little support for survivors of violence from the church and often the survivor is blamed and marginalized. And yet the church often has the infrastructure such as safe houses to support survivors.
Process of Engagement

- **Partnership** with ZCC, which had already conducted an institutional gender audit and was already thinking about how to address gender (26 denominations)
- Partnered with Padare a men’s forum on gender because only 1 of the 26 denominations is headed by a woman bishop – we needed common ground
- Worked closely with the secretariat at ZCC to develop a strategy for engagement
- **Consultation** meetings with women leaders in the church including the wives of the bishops, which uncovered a wealth of gender inequality issues that the women wanted addressed including lack of proper reporting structures for issues of GBV, leadership etc
- Through consultations and context analysis realised that GBV was the best entry point
- Convened a conference to take the bishops through the concept of gender and make a case for their involvement in promoting gender justice
- Partnered with WCC for development of biblical texts on gender based violence and inequality
- Worked with the Women’s Ministry to present on gender laws, including the constitution and the anti domestic violence law
- Used a gallery walk of media stories collected over 3 months on gender based violence or glaring gender inequality particularly those involving the church
- A lot of focus on men and how masculinity influences leadership,
- Developed a commitment charter articulating what the Bishops will do going forward
- Bishops developed individual and church level action plans
What have been your successes?

- The commitment of the Bishops – convincing them that it is their duty to address GBV and gender inequality
- Partnership with the WCC
- Initial linkages have been made with some theological colleges and we hope to formalise these
- GFN co-hosting the launch of the Southern Africa Faith movement for gender justice with Sonke Gender Justice (SA) in April 11
- The network is steadily growing as a key player in the sector, recently invited by DFID to develop a small proposal as part of the TRACE civil society strengthening funding instrument
- Invited to share experiences during the East Africa launch
Challenges?

From the onset the GFN is not about the Christian faith only but it aims to reach out to other faiths. The network is not yet clear on how to do this but we are currently developing our strategy to articulate how other faiths will be engaged.

Some faith groups are very difficult to access e.g. the charismatic churches.

Gender and inequality is broad and while there is need to include other marginalized groups, the network faces some challenges on how to manage the tension between strengthening the network while also engaging church groups to embrace other marginalized groups.

Following up and maintaining the momentum is challenging because the Bishops are the political leaders the actual implementers are a different set of people who we need to convince – ZCC structures instrumental.

Fundraising for continued work – proposals to donors.
Tips for others who wish to engage faith leaders

- **The right Partnership is key**: ensure sustainability and most church leadership is male and finding a gender organisation (or other) that can reach out to them and avoid polarization.

- **Find an issue that resonates with the church groups as a starting point**: in Zimbabwe tackling gender inequality head on seemed too complex, so we chose GBV as a way of connecting with the broader inequality issues.

- **Start small**: especially if you do not already have a broad-based interfaith group to engage with, work with the groups which you have a relationship with already and then build from there.

- **Consultation and research**: get your facts right before you engage the church leaders, this will make your case more credible: in our case we had consultation meetings with the women leaders in the churches and media reports so that we would have the real information on the ground before we approached the church leaders.

- **Refer to Side by Side and other gender and faith movements**: this will encourage the faith leaders.

- **Planning and patience**: It will likely take a while before you get all the actors on board, but be patient and look for allies that can help you (in our case we worked with the WCC, which has a wealth of experience working with churches).

- **Allow the key stakeholders to lead**: so that they own and drive the agenda.
Tips Continued

- **Buy in and commitment at the highest level:** we went in for buy in from the Bishops as a starting point because we knew that if we got the political buy in then it would be easier from then on: this can be done in different ways, but we used the commitment charter as a symbol of the commitment by Bishops.

- **Working with existing structures:** as much as possible after the launch of our network we have been working with the church structures, this will make it easy for us to provide support without spreading ourselves too thin.

- **Continued engagement with the church leaders:** this is key in order to keep their interest. We aim to have newsletters, update the ZCC website and our facebook page but also use commemoration days.

- **Fundraising:** as you rightly note, a concept note and budget are good starting points, so you can share with interested funders. We have raised bits and pieces of money from different places.
When do you think you will see changes in social norms/reduction in GBV as a result

- Some quick wins: changes in church policies, changes in language (more positive gender affirming)

- Medium term changes: the churches becoming an active part of the GBV survivors referral system, advocating for changes in behaviour, advocating for implementation of laws.

- Long term changes: such as changes in culture, increased gender balanced representation in faith structures
Challenges

A changing religious context – charismatic churches, and the challenge of getting audience with Makandiwa etc