

Strategy on Working with Religious and Traditional Institutions and Leaders

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Abbreviations and acronyms

FOWMAN	Federation of Muslim Women Association Nigeria
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
MSS	Muslim Student Society
NSCIA	Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs
V4C	Voices for Change
VAPP	Violence Against Persons Prohibition Bill (VAPP Bill)
VAWG	Violence against Women and Girls
WACOL	Women Aid Collective Nigeria
WOWICAN	Women's Wing Christian Association of Nigeria
YOWICAN	Youth Wing Christian Association of Nigeria



Section 1: Background

In Nigeria, women and girls are subject to systematic disadvantage and discrimination – particularly those who are poor, live in rural areas and are from particular social groups. Gender inequality is manifested in violence against women and girls (VAWG), barriers to accessing quality education for girls, early marriage, poor reproductive and maternal health, and legal discrimination (particularly regarding family law). Differences in women and men’s status and equality are due to a complex interplay of economic, political, historical and social factors operating at the household, community, institutional and policy level – and key amongst these are prevalent social and cultural norms (perpetuated both formally and informally through social institutions and structures), traditions, codes of conduct and laws which influence attitudes and behaviours towards girls and women, and boys and men.¹

This *systematic* discrimination against women and girls can only be effectively addressed by working at all levels, and with everyone in the community – families, opinion leaders and influencers, and both informal and formal institutions. It is also necessary for the attitudes of men and boys to change. At all levels, men play crucial ‘gatekeeper’ roles, as parliamentarians, government officials, religious, traditional and community leaders and family members (husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers), within which they often perpetuate and reinforce patterns of gender discrimination. This can be through controlling women’s reproductive choices and access to education and healthcare; controlling household decision-making and resources; limiting their public participation, by controlling resources and dominating decision-making within the household and community; or supporting patriarchal beliefs and norms which allow other men to engage in such actions.

Engaging men who are opinion leaders, and working with the whole community rather than just with girls and women has led to successful and progressive change in Nigeria in the North and South.² Religious and traditional leaders, institutions and organisations are particularly important influencers in Nigeria, and V4C will need to both influence their attitudes towards gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE), and harness their influence to change attitudes at the community level.

Traditional leaders can refer to community leaders and chiefs, such as *emirs* (traditional rulers in predominantly Muslim Northern Nigeria who direct the district heads and ward head), *Oba* (traditional rulers in the Benin Kingdom in the south), traditional rulers of local government areas (LGAs), and village heads.

Religious leaders in Nigeria are a diverse group of people, which includes faith-based leaders of Islamic and Christian faith. Muslim leaders include *imams* (faith and opinion leaders), Islamic scholars – *Sheikhs* or *Ulama* (learned legal and religious scholars), and *Amirs* or *Amiras* (presidents of Muslim organisations). Christian leaders include church leaders such as bishops and pastors, and theologians. Both faiths have prominent leaders, e.g. the Archbishop of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto, with large national followings. It is important to note that some traditional leaders are also religious leaders (e.g. acting as imams or teachers of the Qu’ran).

¹ Jones et al. (2010); see also the DFID-funded *Gender in Nigeria Report* (2012)

² Pathfinder International (2004)



Working with religious and traditional institutions and leaders is important for the following reasons:

- They are grounded in philosophical and theological frameworks, which allows them to frame their discourse on particular issues within spiritual commitments to peace, justice and social equality.³ Both Islam and Christianity, for example, emphasise the importance of social justice, and society's responsibility towards the poorest and most vulnerable groups.
- They are considered to embody moral values, which enables them to influence personal and family domains and attitudes and behaviours. The centrality of religion in Nigeria enables religious institutions and leaders to exercise considerable influence.
- They have access to extensive networks and communications channels, and thus play an important role in disseminating messages; shaping public opinion; mobilising volunteers, financial and advocacy support; and influencing government policy.
- They are key civil society actors, and are often active in providing services – in education, health and welfare support - to communities in general, as well as to vulnerable groups that government and development agencies cannot or do not reach.
- Faith-based organisations are considered to have more legitimacy, respect and influence than secular NGOs.⁴ They tend to be more established in, and have closer links with, communities and, it is argued, are not greeted with suspicion when looking to influence values and social rules (e.g. those governing family life, reproductive choices, etc.) through religious and educational activities.

This strategy has been developed on the basis of a rapid assessment process, which included a literature review, and fieldwork (involving interviews with Religious leaders, traditional leaders, CSOs, media organisations, government representatives, and focus groups discussions with younger and older men and women at the community level) in two of V4C's target states (Enugu and Kano) between October and December 2013, and with input from the V4C team and key informants. An Analysis Report presenting the findings of the assessment is available upon request. It is important to note that whilst the assessment methodology was designed to find out about the broad spectrum of religious and traditional leadership in the target states, both the literature and the field research provided richer and more detailed information on religious than on traditional leaders, and within that category, on Islam than on Christianity. Further research will therefore be needed to address these gaps.

The Strategy for working with Religious and Traditional Leaders forms part of Output 3 in the V4C programme – working with key influencers, including men and boys, and Religious and Traditional Leaders. Our understanding of the role of this output's work is as follows:

- If work is carried out to change the attitudes of young men and boys;
- And Religious and Traditional leaders and media personalities speak out on gender issues;
- And men's networks are supported to challenge gender-based discrimination

This will result in:

- An acceleration of attitude and behaviour change among Nigerian citizens on issues of violence against women, decision-making and leadership;
- The removal of cultural and attitudinal barriers which exclude and marginalise women and girls;

³ Hanmer and Robinson (2012)

⁴ Davis et al. (2011)



- And a strengthened enabling environment for women’s empowerment.

Key risks which may affect this strategy include:

- Work with boys and men may create a backlash against AGW;
- Targeted influencers may lose relevance among men and boys;
- Religious and Traditional Leaders may view V4C messages as a “Western imposition”;
- Media personalities selected to promote V4C messages may engage in behaviour which calls into question their commitment to gender equality.

V4C will monitor these risks and act quickly to mitigate them if there is evidence that they are affecting the project.

Section 2: Contribution of Working with Religious and Traditional Leaders to Social Norm and Behavioural Change

Voices for Change is geared towards social norm and behaviour change related to discriminatory gender norms influencing violence against women and girls and their role in leadership and decision-making. Success factors for changing these norms and behaviours have been identified and programmatic measures to cultivate these have been identified. The following table indicates what these are for working with men and boys.

<i>Community Awareness factors [note that community is not necessarily geographical; it could be a workplace, educational institution, or a virtual community]</i>		
Success Factor	Commentary	Measures
1. Individual attitudes need to change; new information can help drive this	This is a necessary but not sufficient factor to shift social norms	<p>The Strategy will build the capacity of RTLs regarding gender issues. Findings from the Landmark Research will be shared and key insights regarding the impact of the enabling environment will be highlighted. V4C will also build the capacity of the RTLs to address the social norms around violence against women, women in leadership and decision-making.</p> <p>The benefits of gender equality will also be placed within relevant religious, scriptural and cultural contexts, to demonstrate that gender equality does not conflict with traditional or religious belief systems.</p> <p>RTLs will promote V4C messages to their communities/ congregations, accelerating attitude change among the wider Nigerian citizenry. They will do this through direct preaching and also through the media.</p>
2. Individuals need to know that others in the community are ready to change	Social norms concern beliefs about what <u>other</u> people do and expect	V4C will work with umbrella organisations within the main religious communities, and traditional institutions ensuring that individual religious, traditional leaders are aware of the wider momentum for change.
3. Public debate and	Social norms	RTLs offer an excellent opportunity to promote



Community Awareness factors [note that community is not necessarily geographical; it could be a workplace, educational institution, or a virtual community]

Success Factor	Commentary	Measures
deliberation are required	need public debate, so everyone can agree to change together	public debate of gender equality, through sermons, pastoral and wider educational activities. Many churches and mosques hold regular discussions which will provide a platform to promote such debate.
4. Communities need to change together	Shifts in social norms are harder for individuals than for groups	V4C will encourage public commitment to change, at the level of local religious and cultural communities; and at the institutional level within Christianity, Islam and traditional leadership structures.

Publicising the change

Success Factor	Commentary	Measures
5. Positive deviants/ role models need to be publicised	Examples of communities which have changed can promote new norms	Religious and traditional leaders who are committed to gender equality will act as role models for the wider community.
6. The benefits of the new behaviour should be demonstrated	People need to feel they will gain something from shifting to the new norm	V4C messaging and capacity building among RTLs will ensure that they understand the benefits of more gender equal behaviour, and can communicate this to their communities.
7. Influential people/ early adopters can spread the new norm through organised diffusion	Behaviour change can occur quickly when a critical mass/ tipping point is reached	RTLs will be selected to ensure they are influential among their communities so they can spread the new norm through acting as a role model, and more formal preaching/ education/ promotional activity.

Reinforcing new behaviours and norms

Success Factor	Commentary	Measures
8. Opportunities to behaviour in line with the new norm should be highlighted	New behaviours need to be practiced to become normal	V4C capacity building among RTLs will ensure that they are aware of opportunities to practice new behaviours, both for themselves and their congregations or communities. Eg, leadership opportunities for women, projects to combat domestic violence, support the VAPP and GEO bills.
9. A new set of sanctions and rewards needs to be created to reinforce the new norm	People may slip back to old behaviours without rewards and sanctions	Religious and traditional leaders can create social approval for positive new behaviours through their own attitudes; and can promote community level sanctions and disapproval for old, harmful practices. E.g. stigmatising men who practice domestic violence, encouraging women to stand for leadership positions within the church/ local community.



Section 3: Guiding Principles

The Voices for Change programme aims to bring about transformational change in the status of women and girls, so that they are able to experience better development outcomes. This means challenging entrenched attitudes and norms, many of which are - consciously and unconsciously - reinforced by religious and traditional leaders and institutions, whilst at the same time motivating and helping them to influence others to change their attitudes and behaviours towards GEWE issues. Thus V4C's work with religious and traditional leaders and institutions has two key strands:

1. Targeting attitudinal and behaviour change *amongst* religious and traditional institutions and leaders.
2. Working with religious and traditional institutions and leaders to bring about attitudinal, behaviour and policy change in the wider enabling environment, with a focus on V4C's three key focus areas: violence against women and girls (VAWG), women's leadership, and women's decision-making.

The strategy is informed by the following key principles:

- *Taking a long-term view:* Changing attitudes and behaviours towards GEWE is a complex and long-term process, and the programme needs to identify the most strategic entry points where it can achieve the greatest leverage. It may be that V4C's work sets off new processes and dynamics of change. V4C will be attentive to these emerging opportunities, and will work to identify and dialogue with suitable and interested parties that can carry on the work beyond the programme.
- *Working at multiple levels:* Bringing about sustainable change in the attitudes and behaviours of religious and traditional leaders requires working at both *individual* and *organisational* levels. We believe that strengthening the capacities and skills of individual religious and traditional leaders, and promoting greater awareness and will amongst the leadership of religious and faith-based organisations to engage with GEWE issues will support their more strategic, effective and sustainable engagement by on the gender agenda.
- *Working with others:* There is existing experience amongst CSOs in Nigeria of engaging religious and traditional leaders on social issues, and it will be important that V4C builds collaborative and learning relationships with these stakeholders. The programme will also work to identify existing champions amongst religious and traditional leaders, as well as to cultivate new ones.
- *Ensuring ownership and promoting collaboration:* Given the highly sensitive nature of working with religious and traditional leaders on gender issues, any activities must be owned, endorsed and, where possible, hosted by national actors. This is critical for ensuring that initiatives are relevant to context, have the buy-in of key stakeholders, and have good potential for sustainability. This will also help to mitigate any backlash. V4C will also need to support attitudes, behaviours, processes and structures which enable engagement and dialogue between different actors, and encourage engagement, dialogue, and collaboration on key issues.

A focus on learning: Although a wide range of programmes focusing on gender issues have included work with religious and traditional leaders, there is a limited evidence base of what works. V4C work develop effective monitoring and evaluation approaches which can monitor change, and record and share lessons learned to inform future programmes in Nigeria and internationally.



Section 4: Opportunities and challenges

Opportunities

The rapid assessment showed that there is considerable appetite amongst religious and traditional leaders to be involved in programming on gender issues. Some individual religious and traditional leaders currently championing GEWE issues, and whom V4C could work with have already been identified by the assessment. However, further mapping will be required, and V4C should work with women's organisations, CSOs, CBOs and FBOs with experience of engaging with religious and traditional leaders to identify those leaders who are considered opinion leaders, and are interested in gender issues. This can build on the Inception Phase Opinion Leaders and Champions report that V4C produced.

The rapid assessment has also revealed that most religious communities have high-level leadership or coordinating organisations which operate at the state and/or national level, and which provide guidance and support to leadership cadres at local levels. V4C can work with these structures to multiply the impact of training and sensitisation activities. Again, some of these structures have been identified by the rapid assessment, but further mapping will be needed.

Religious and traditional leaders and organisations often have extensive networks which enable them to disseminate messages to large groups of people. Along with preaching platforms, they often also have access to, or manage, media communication channels which reach large audiences, e.g. radio and television broadcasting which can be employed to raise awareness or conduct advocacy activities around behaviour and social change.⁵ This appears to be more common for religious leaders than traditional leaders, and is something that both Christian and Muslim leaders do—at the national and state levels. At the local level, some religious leaders operate their own print media sources—including newsletters and other publications, which sometimes engage with development issues—e.g. raising awareness about available health services.

Religious student associations (such as the Muslim Student Society (MSS)⁶)—some of which have extensive networks across schools and colleges in different states—also play a key role in disseminating information to, and influencing students and schools. Working through a range of religious and traditional structures will allow V4C to leverage their networks to increase the reach of its messages, and amplify impact.

The importance of religion and tradition to people's lives gives religious and traditional leaders credibility and an important 'validation' role. As a result, gaining their support and buy-in for programming can be an effective way of making sure programming is grounded in community realities, gaining strategic input and expertise, establishing credibility, leveraging their networks, institutionalising change, and avoiding backlash. For this reason, many of the CSO and donor participants in the rapid assessment spoke of making special efforts to ensure the continued support and buy-in of religious and traditional leaders. V4C should, from the outset, establish strong collaborative relationships with religious and traditional leaders and institutions (including student associations), and cultivate their ownership of the programme, and of GEWE issues as a whole. These strategic alliances will provide these with the engagement with GEWE programmes they have been seeking, whilst providing V4C with further champions to help ground and grow this work. This collaboration should occur at the level of the overall programme (possibly through selection of few strategic Religious and Traditional Leaders' Advisers responsible for providing strategic guidance to the overall

⁵ Hanmer and Robinson (2012); findings from the V4C 2014 RTL field consultation

⁶ MSS emerged as a key organisation from the rapid assessment. V4C should investigate whether there are other influential religious student societies as well—e.g. the Scripture Union.



direction of the programme) as well as the individual projects/ initiatives that are commissioned or implemented.

A wide range of programmes focusing on gender issues - in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa more widely – have included work with religious and traditional leaders. While most of the work engaging religious and traditional leaders appears to be around health and education issues, there are also some examples of engaging them in advocacy around key legislation to protect widows' rights, and to support women's access to justice.⁷ V4C can learn from these initiatives, and can also work to build relationships with the actors involved, with a view to sharing information and knowledge, building complementary partnerships, and developing a shared vision for change which could be taken up beyond the life of the V4C programme.

Challenges

Whilst the importance of religious and traditional actors as allies in promoting the GEWE agenda is increasingly accepted, it must also be recognised that these same actors can also play a significant role in perpetuating patriarchal structures and gender inequality. Islamic and Christian religious discourses (often based on restrictive interpretations of religious teachings) – as well as traditional beliefs – have historically been used to promote patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria (as in many other parts of the world). Religious and traditional structures in Nigeria (and in many other contexts) are male-dominated, and often actively discourage the involvement of women in decision-making. A key issue emerging from the rapid assessment was that women work actively in the service of religion and religious organisations, and are often considered influential actors in the community. However, they are mostly excluded from religious hierarchies and decision-making structures and processes.

Bringing about attitude and behaviour change – particularly around entrenched social norms – is a long-term process which involves negotiating complex power relations and politics. Religious and traditional actors in Nigeria span a large sectarian and ideological spectrum, and it is likely that there are differences and divisions even within particular institutions and cadres. V4C should expect that there will be opposition and resistance from religious and traditional actors. It is hoped that the programme's approach of identifying and engaging progressive and influential religious and traditional leaders, emphasising that gender inequality affects not only women but their families and society as a whole, and encouraging dialogue between religious and traditional leaders themselves, and with other stakeholders will promote open discussion of their concerns, and will motivate more religious and traditional actors to engage.

Religious and traditional leaders who choose to engage with the programme – or even with gender issues more broadly – can face community backlash or even threats to their personal security. There is a particular danger that they are characterised as promoting a 'Western agenda' aiming to undermining the religious and cultural values of Nigeria. V4C will need to ensure that leaders are involved in shaping and leading all programme activities, their association with the programme is kept discreet, programme staff and partners are aware of the risks, and all activities proceed at a pace that is appropriate.

The landscape of religious and traditional institutions and leaders in Nigeria is complex, and their form, relationships and influence can vary significantly by region, state and community. Neither the literature review nor the rapid assessment have provided enough information to develop a comprehensive typology of religious and traditional leaders and institutions, or analysis of the different ways in which they work, and their relationships with other stakeholders. V4C will need to commission a further mapping of religious and traditional stakeholders in the target states, or ensure that it works with local partners with detailed

⁷ Para-Mallam et al. (2011)



knowledge of the context. Whilst the Analysis Report, on which this strategy is based, outlines many key religious and traditional leaders and structures in both the north and south, there are knowledge gaps in both regions, with particularly large gaps for the south, where we have insufficient data on who are the key actors, and fewer rich examples of religious and traditional leaders working on GEWE issues—apart from working on widows' rights.

The importance of this detailed stakeholder mapping was underscored by the CSO stakeholders in the rapid assessment, who stated that it was important to understand the religious and traditional structures within the specific context in which they operate, determine the level of influence of different leaders, and tailor approaches to religious leaders and traditional leaders depending on the issue in question.

Section 5: Stakeholders and partners

The **primary targets** of this strategy are: national- and state-level Muslim and Christian religious leaders and traditional leaders⁸ who are already active on GEWE issues, and those that could be involved; religious students' associations; faith-based organisations; interfaith organisations; civil society organisations working on gender issues; and the women, men, girls and boys that they engage with.

The rapid assessment has begun to highlight some potential partners with whom V4C could engage in this work. These include organisations such as⁹:

- *Women Aid Collective Nigeria (WACOL)*, which has engaged Islamic scholar and jurists in consultative workshops on how to best improve local jurisprudence on women's rights.
- *Federation of Muslim Women Association Nigeria (FOMWAN)*, which has worked to promote girls' education, women's economic empowerment and better access to reproductive health services.
- *Muslim Students Society (MSS)*, Nigeria's first-ever major Muslim youth organisation and the only recognised Muslim student movement. MSS has branches in all secondary schools and higher education institutions teaching Muslim students.
- *Centre for Human Rights in Islam (CHRI)* in Kano, which aims to promote human rights from an Islamic perspective, works to build capacity of NGOs to defend human rights, and raises rights awareness among young people.
- The *Council of Ulama*, which organises seminars and retreats for imams, Muslim leaders and the public, and broadcasts radio and TV lectures/announcements.

The rapid assessment has also highlighted several important interfaith networks, and religious apex bodies, including: the *Nigerian Inter-Religious Council*, which was established by the government; the *Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)*, and its women's and youth wings (*WOWICAN* and *YOWICAN*), the *Interfaith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria*, which undertakes capacity building activities among faith groups on addressing HIV/AIDS, and advocates for affected people's rights, and the *Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA)*. Inevitably, these organisations have strengths and weaknesses, and V4C will need to consider these carefully before embarking on potential partnerships or collaborations.

⁸ Refer to 'working' definitions on page 3 above.

⁹ Several Christian organisations also came up as potential partners in the rapid assessment, but there is less information about them, so further research will be needed to know which Christian organisations would be appropriate partners. These might include, for example, the National Office of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC)/Caritas, or the Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria, but more information is needed.



Section 6: Expected results

V4C aims to influence the attitudes towards GEWE of 4,000 religious and traditional leaders, and to motivate 1,600 religious and traditional leaders to act to improve the status of women and girls. By supporting these leaders to speak out on GEWE issues, particularly violence against women and girls (VAWG), women's leadership, and women's decision-making – with a view to raising awareness about key issues, creating debate, and influencing policy – they will influence other religious and traditional actors in their networks, local communities and families, resulting in long-term, sustainable and transformative change.

Working with religious and traditional institutions and leaders is a component of Output 3, which aims to *equip key influencers, including boys and men, with improved attitudes to girls and women*. However, the programme recognises that these leaders are key to V4C's goal of transforming social norms and behaviours towards gender equality, and that work to engage them should be integrated across the programme outputs as a cross-cutting priority. This strategy should therefore inform the work of Output 3, as well that of the other outputs. Where relevant, synergies with the other Outputs are highlighted in the sections below.

Section 7: Preferred Approaches

In accordance with the above principles, V4C's work with religious and traditional institutions and leaders will stand upon four pillars: (1) transforming the attitudes and behaviours of religious and traditional leaders through training, sensitisation and knowledge-sharing; (2) securing commitment from high-level religious and traditional leaders and coordinating organisations to promote GEWE issues; (3) supporting religious and traditional institutions and leaders to promote public awareness, discussion and debate on GEWE issues; and (4) engaging religious and traditional institutions and leaders in advocacy and policy change campaigns.

It is likely that V4C will need to work with national partners or religious and traditional leader champions to implement or support these approaches. This is advisable as these partners will bring more detailed knowledge of religious and traditional leadership structures and actors, as well as good practice principles of working effectively with them. However, V4C will need to assess the capacity of these partners on GEWE issues, and ensure that they are oriented to the aims and objectives of the programme, and provided with capacity building support and information.

(1) Transforming attitudes and behaviours of religious and traditional leaders through training, sensitisation and knowledge sharing

Many of the religious and traditional leaders consulted in our field assessment highlighted training and sensitisation activities as a key way of increasing their awareness of gender issues, and indicated that there was high demand for these. Training and capacity building activities can sensitise participants about the issues, as well as inspire leaders to take up the issues and become activists. Certainly, most gender initiatives involving religious and traditional leaders in Nigeria usually involve some form of training and capacity building, and there is some – albeit limited¹⁰ - evidence from Nigeria and the region more widely that these have had some success in changing attitudes and behaviours amongst leaders and communities.¹¹

¹⁰ This is not to say that training programmes are not effective but that there is very limited evidence about their impact on the attitudes and behaviours of religious and traditional actors. International experience also shows that to be effective training activities need to be integrated into a more holistic approach towards capacity building and attitude and behavior change.

¹¹ For example, the USAID-funded Extending Service Delivery Programme built the capacity of religious leaders to provide education, training and counselling on family planning to their congregations and other leaders, and



In addition, experience from Nigeria and the region shows that participation in formal and informal networks provides religious and traditional leaders with the space within which to share information about GEWE issues, build relationships and alliances, and organise collective action. The rapid assessment shows that religious and traditional leaders are already engaging with each other—through religious and traditional networks, including interfaith networks—and that most rely on a combination of formal meetings and informal communication, including phone calls, SMS and writing letters. Whilst most rapid assessment participants agreed that religious and traditional leaders have good relationships with each other—and with CSOs and the media—some noted that these relationships could be further strengthened if they had more opportunities for regular meetings.

Specific activities within this approach could include:

Providing a series of training sessions on the key V4C focus areas of VAWG, women's leadership, and women's role in decision-making. Given the sensitivity around gender discourses in Nigeria, and the risks faced by religious and traditional leaders in particular in engaging with these, it is important that sensitisation sessions are designed and framed in a context-sensitive and appropriate way. V4C should work with its RTL Advisers, men and boys experts, and partner organisations to determine the content, structure, methodology and participant profile of the training programme (including whether the sessions should target Muslim, Christian and traditional leaders as a whole, or separately).

Religious and traditional leaders must also be involved in the design and implementation of the programme, e.g. identifying topics, developing or adapting content, facilitating sessions, and/ or providing high-level endorsement. Training and sensitisation activities should be led by discussion and dialogue, as well as an emphasis on enabling participants to hear directly from women, girls, their communities and CSOs working on GEWE issues (some of which may also be FBOs) about how gender norms and gender inequality affects their lives.

Based on follow-up with the trainees, and discussion with its RTL Advisers, V4C could also consider organising training sessions for female religious scholars, traditional leaders, and the wives of religious and/or traditional leaders. The rapid assessment showed that these women play a key role in reaching women in local communities, supporting sensitisation around their rights, and supporting referral to services.

Learning from training programmes has also shown that there is a risk that the gains from training activities are temporary and that often trainees find it difficult to sustain changed attitudes and behaviours within difficult operating environments. Participants also often need refresher courses, as well as ongoing support. The programme should cover the following areas:

- Encouraging participants to think about how they themselves experience understandings of masculinity - in terms of societal expectations and norms about male behaviour – and to reflect on their own lives, relationships and families. Building awareness of gender issues in this way can then be leveraged to discuss the social roles and expectations of women more explicitly. It can also help to build trust between the participants and the trainers/ facilitators, and encourage greater openness.
- Building awareness of how VAWG, women's lack of decision-making power, and the lack of women in leadership positions affects the lives of women and girls, and their families and communities

institutionalise change within their community structures. Community surveys undertaken after the project's completion found that there was a high recall of recommendations on birth delay and birth spacing – with a high number of interviewees reporting having heard about these directly from either religious leaders (imams) or FOMWAN members. The majority of men gained this knowledge from imams and friends, while women reported hearing about the recommendations from imams and husbands.



- Encouraging discussion about gender justice in the context of Islam, Christianity, and traditional systems and customary law, and drawing on existing interpretive texts where possible (e.g. the 'Promoting Women's Rights Through Sharia in Northern Nigeria' booklet published by the British Council)
- Building awareness of international and national laws, instruments and policies on women's rights, e.g. CEDAW or the African Union protocols.
- Building capacity on communicating, and working with communities (including women and girls) to identify needs and priorities, developing action plans, and monitoring progress.

Clear and targeted materials on all of the above should be provided to participants so that they can use these to inform their preaching, media and advocacy activities.

Establishing a programme of knowledge-sharing and networking events. The primary purpose of these events¹² would be to promote knowledge-sharing and relationship-building amongst religious and traditional leaders and other stakeholders working on gender issues. The events could take place at the state level, and be open to religious and traditional leaders at the national, state and community level who are involved in initiatives addressing gender inequality, women's organisations, youth organisations, government representatives, academics, and other CSO. Each event could be focussed on a different theme, and involve presentations and discussion about the work that leaders have been undertaking on that theme, and their experiences, achievements, challenges and lessons learned. The events could also provide a platform for discussion and consensus- and coalition-building (along with CSO participants) on possible advocacy initiatives as well as the collective mobilisation of religious and traditional leaders. V4C should remain attentive to the possibility that the events may coalesce into a formal network.

Interested trainees from the sensitisation sessions could also attend the events, and further consolidate their knowledge and capacity on gender issues within a supportive environment. Events could also be used to follow up on their progress after the training sessions – as a way of providing encouragement and peer recognition, enabling the exchange of information, identifying additional areas for training, and documenting learning. The events could focus on bringing together both religious (Muslim and Christian) and traditional leaders, or be organised for specific groups. V4C will need to work with its RTL Advisers and partners to determine the most appropriate format.

(2) Securing commitment from high-level religious and traditional leaders and coordinating organisations to promote GEWE issues

Most religious communities have high-level leadership or coordinating organisations which operate at the state or national level, and which provide guidance and support to leadership cadres at local levels. Because religious and traditional leaders are well-respected in Nigeria, obtaining high-level public commitments on certain issues from leadership structures, or even particular individuals, could impact attitudes at national and community levels, and provide an important basis for larger-scale mobilisation of religious and traditional networks, as well as for institutionalising change. Such policy and public statements can also be a key way of holding other actors, including government, to account. V4C's work under this approach could include:

¹² These events should begin as conferences or meetings, where religious and traditional leaders can meet face to face. V4C could also explore the option of later taking some of these events online, using the Output 5 e-Hub to create e-events where those religious and traditional leaders with access to the internet can continue their discussions there. The rapid assessment found that two challenges religious and traditional leaders face in engaging with development projects are: 1) finding the time, and 2) arranging logistics and paying for travel. Thus, having some complementary e-events could provide a cost-effective way to provide follow-up to these events—whilst also removing these time and logistical challenges for participants.



- Identifying existing high-level religious and traditional leaders already engaged on gender issues to promote the VAWG, women's leadership, and decision-making agenda to their networks and colleagues. This could be done through consultation with V4C's Advisory Group, as well as with women's organisations with experience of working with religious and traditional leaders.
- Conducting targeted advocacy with identified leaders and structures on issues of VAWG, women's leadership, and decision-making, including through inviting them to the training sessions; providing advocacy and communications materials; promoting interaction with women's organisations working on these issues; and organising community dialogues for leaders to hear directly from women about their lives. This should include advocacy to the leadership of religious student associations about these issues are manifested within educational institutions.
- Bringing together high-level leaders in 'safe spaces' workshops where they can openly discuss the issues, draw on religious texts and/ or customary principles, air concerns and reservations, and reach an informed consensus.
- Supporting leaders to issue public declarations committing themselves, and calling on others - other leaders, religious and traditional institutions, and governments - to take certain actions. V4C can provide technical and financial support to the implementation of these actions, which may include:
 - Calling on religious and traditional institutions to adopt policies to address the issues.
 - Committing to clarifying religious and customary texts and principles as they relate to the issues (including drawing on guidance that already exists).
 - Committing to ensure that preaching, sermons and meetings reflect key messages.
 - Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of individual leaders and organisational structures at all levels in relation to the issues.
 - Pledging that religious and traditional institutions will discipline any members who commit violence against women and girls.
 - Pledging to undertake advocacy with policy makers.
 - Pledging to engage with key legislative processes.

(3) Supporting religious and traditional institutions and leaders to promote public awareness, discussion and debate on GEWE issues

Outreach and mobilisation activities by religious and traditional leaders are a key way of increasing awareness about gender issues amongst their constituencies, and stimulating and leading debates amongst men, women, boys and girls on transforming gender relations. Religious and traditional leaders perform a range of community outreach activities, including preaching to congregations; holding office hours; convening public meetings; and providing individual and family counselling. There is also evidence from Nigeria, for example, that some Muslim Friday sermons are broadcast live on the radio, thus increasing their reach. Both the rapid assessment and the recent V4C Target Audience Study found that religious leaders and institutions play an important role in schools and post-secondary institutions. The rapid assessment and V4C's Target Audience Study found that religious leaders are far more influential than traditional leaders for young people.

The rapid assessment findings also showed that some¹³ religious and traditional leaders – particularly at the local level - are already championing GEWE issues, and are using media platforms, community spaces (e.g. town squares) and the pulpit to champion issues such as access to health services, girls' education, widows' rights, and early marriage. V4C can

¹³ Many interviewees in the rapid assessment provided examples of religious or traditional leaders who are already engaged with gender issues. However, given the limited scope of the consultation exercise, it is difficult to derive from this a sense of what proportion of the overall group this constitutes.



support these outreach activities in a range of ways – some of which cut across the V4C outputs (this is indicated where relevant):

- The training and sensitisation activities suggested in Approach (1) will provide leaders with information about how VAWG, and lack of women’s leadership and decision-making power affects women, their families and society as a whole. Religious and traditional leaders can use this information to form the basis of their sermons and meetings.
- The high-level workshops suggested in Approach (2) may generate guidance on religious and customary texts and/ or principles as they relate to the key issues of VAWG, women’s leadership and decision-making, or they may endorse existing guidance. Leaders can draw on this for their communications activities.
- Featuring champions in V4C’s media campaigns. Given that some religious and traditional leaders already appear regularly in the media—print, radio and social—V4C can work with them within these existing spaces to promote awareness and discussion on its focus areas (Output 2). V4C may engage religious and traditional champions in planned V4C radio programming, and further consider commissioning a series of radio or television shows specifically on religious and traditional perspectives on VAWG, women’s leadership and decision-making.
- Engaging with religious students associations to develop a programme of events and activities to reach young people within educational institutions, including guest lectures from high-profile religious and traditional leader champions, and providing information to students (Output 1).
- Exploring the use of online, media and social media platforms to support information-sharing and interactive engagement between religious and traditional leaders and young people. Both the rapid assessment and the Target Audience Study show religious leaders are using social media to engage young people, but the rapid assessment did not actually show any young people saying that they use social media to interact with religious leaders. Therefore, V4C should be careful to ensure that any social media work will actually reach the intended audience. It will also be critical to carefully consider the risk of backlash involved in social media work.

(4) Engaging religious and traditional institutions and leaders in advocacy and policy change campaigns

There is increasing recognition of the value of engaging religious and traditional leaders in advocacy initiatives, for example, by linking them to broader advocacy efforts beyond their communities – perhaps at the state or national level - to change policy, legislation and general perceptions. The tripartite legal system in Nigeria, where legislative responsibilities are shared by a combination of secular, traditional and religious bodies, makes including religious and traditional leaders in advocacy on legislative change particularly crucial.

Participants in the rapid assessment highlighted several cases of religious and traditional leaders successfully influencing policy on social issues, for example the 2005 campaign to prevent the maltreatment of widows in Anambra state, and UNICEF’s work in engaging religious and traditional leaders in Kano in advocacy efforts for the passage and implementation of the Child Rights Bill.¹⁴ In fact, it has also been argued that the failure of other advocacy initiatives — for example the failed efforts to date to domesticate CEDAW in Nigeria - have been partly to do with the lack of involvement of religious and traditional leaders and FBOs in the domestication of the Bill.¹⁵ Some activities within this approach could include:

¹⁴ See the literature review and analysis report for more on these examples.

¹⁵ Para-Mallam et al. (2011)



- Engaging religious and traditional leaders in Output 4's work on advocating for the passage of the Violence against Persons Prohibition Bill and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill at the state level, and possibly at the national-level as well. This can include engaging key champions at the state and national level, but can also include sensitising religious and traditional leaders about—and generating dialogue on—the content of this legislation. Leaders can then use this information to raise awareness through sermons and other communications; lobby policymakers directly; and mobilise support amongst other religious and traditional leaders (Output 4).
- Output 4 should also include the Muslim Student Society (MSS) and any other religious student societies that emerge through future scoping on advocacy to influence school-based policies within post-secondary institutions (and potentially also secondary schools), to influence school policy in post-secondary institutions—and potentially also in other school (Output 4)
- Being attentive to advocacy initiatives that may emerge from the knowledge sharing events, and providing funding or technical assistance, or providing information about funding opportunities, key contacts, etc.

