

Interfaith GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy 2024 - 2030

Jointly developed and presented by the Faith Action to End GBV Collective
in collaboration with We Will Speak Out South Africa on behalf of
participating partners

October 2024

For further information or to get involved:

coordinator@wvsosa.org.za

communication@wvsosa.org.za

info@wvsosa.org.za



Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
Background and Context.....	4
Grounded in Shared Values	5
Problem review	6
The Strategy 2024 – 2030.....	6
Policy and Strategy Environment.....	7
Way forward.....	7
FULL STRATEGIC PLAN.....	9
Introduction & Background.....	9
The interfaith Sector in South Africa	11
What has/is being done by the Faith Sector to promote development?.....	11
Long-standing GBV-related faith initiatives.....	11
Roadblocks and Progress	12
What is the role of Religion in GBV?.....	14
Spiritual Abuse	15
Why the faith sector?.....	16
Religion and GBV: The Evidence	16
GBV Landscape.....	18
What is GBV?.....	18
What is GBV Prevention?	18
The Context of GBV in South Africa and its relevance to the faith sector	19
Grounded in Shared Values	21
The Interfaith Sector GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy: 2024 – 2030.....	21
What does GBV Prevention mean for the Faith Sector: A working description.....	21
Vision.....	22
Developmental Goal	22
Approaches utilised in developing this Strategy	23
Outcomes	23
Problem Review	24
Looking Back, Looking Forward: The SSPAR Framework	25

Pathways and connectors..... 29

Policy and Strategy Environment..... 31

Next Steps 32

Conclusion..... 32

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Context

The Interfaith GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy 2024 – 2030, has its roots in an organic consultation process amongst diverse scholars, activists and leaders, as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the faith sector, that originally began as early as 2013 and intensified during 2020. It constitutes an attempt to unite a growing faith sector movement that has recognised the seriousness of gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms including femicide, as perhaps the most fundamental and enduring social challenge in South Africa today.

We Will Speak Out South Africa (WWSOSA) was founded in 2013. In June 2020, a faith-sector forum was jointly convened by UN Women (South Africa) and Sonke Gender Justice with support from the South African Council of Churches to discuss the Faith sector's role in mitigating COVID-19 and supporting the roll-out of the NSP on GBVF. From that forum emerged the Faith Action Collective, with WWSOSA as Coordinating Secretariat. It currently includes partners from eight faiths: African Traditional, Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, as well as partners from the NGO and Government sectors. In all its diversity, the Collective has committed to unite around the same agenda – *to mobilise and equip the faith sector to address GBV more effectively* within the faith sector itself and in all South African communities.

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) have a long history of playing significant roles in local community development in various ways¹ including but not limited to GBV prevention and response. The 2nd Presidential Summit on GBVF in 2022 overtly recognised the important role that the faith sector can and in some instances does play, as a key stakeholder in the prevention of and response to GBV. A flagship collaboration between WWSOSA and almost 20 partners of Faith Action has been the innovative holistic Faith Leaders Gender Transformation Programme (FLGTP), which has produced over 50 graduates with anticipated indirect reach of over 5000 congregants and community members.^{2 3} In November 2023, after almost 2 years of consultations amongst people of 8 diverse religious traditions, the Faith Action Collective launched a Joint Interfaith GBV Statement of Commitment⁴ and ran a Signature Campaign, garnering almost 700 signatories. This award-winning initiative⁵ is considered a ground-breaking mobilisation campaign and historic move by the interfaith sector in South Africa.

While the religious sector continues to have a reputation for its silence, condoning and/or perpetrating various forms of GBV,⁶ growing numbers of alternative voices are emerging from individuals and groups/organisations within and outside of the Faith sector. These calls for change are, in many cases,

¹ <https://www.leadershiponline.co.za/the-role-of-faith-based-organisations-in-social-development-in-south-africa/>

² Based on the assumptions that one congregational faith leader's sphere of influence reaches at least 100 persons.

³ An independent Outcomes Harvesting study has been documenting some key 'stories of challenge and change' to be published by WWSOSA in 2024.

⁴ <https://www.wwsosa.org.za/media-statement-interfaith-action-summit/>

⁵ The Collective's project: "Mobilizing and capacitating the Faith Sector as a credible and effective stakeholder in addressing gender-based violence in South Africa" won second prize in GIZ's 2024 Gender Competition amongst all the gender-related projects it supports globally.

⁶ Chisale, S. S. (2020). 'Deliver us from patriarchy': A gendered perspective of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and implications for pastoral care. *Verbum et ecclesia*, 41(1), 1-8.

intentionally resisting and exposing oppressive teachings and practices. They draw on liberatory elements in their sacred texts and a sense of calling to bring abundant life to all regardless of who they are.⁷

GBV landscape

There is a persistently high prevalence of GBV in South Africa, which has increased even as counter-initiatives have grown. According to Statistics South Africa (2016), 21% (one in five) partnered women has experienced physical violence by a partner.⁸ Statistics SA also notes that this country's incidence of rape is among the highest in the world.⁹ Rape statistics just for the period Jan-June 2024¹⁰ reached 18,561, translating into 3,093 incidences of rape per month or 103 per day and over 4 rapes every hour, and this is reported cases only. Sixty percent (60%) of all rapes take place in homes and many take place in schools.

Murder statistics show that in 2019/20, a total of 2,695 women were murdered in South Africa. This translates to a woman being murdered every 3 hours, ranking femicide in this country as the fourth highest in the world.¹¹ The implications of these statistics for the faith sector is articulated by one faith leader as follows:

"...if 80% of South Africa's population are churchgoers and 90% of those who actually go to church are women, then my church consists of many, many survivors. But also of perpetrators. How blind am I to the realities of my congregants? What does that mean for my ministry? We have to change our church culture, even if it becomes something different." (Bishop Nkosinathi Zondi, Truevine Community Church.)¹²

As recognised in the NSP on GBVF, the CNPS and various research findings (local and international), the most prevalent drivers of GBV include social, cultural **and religious gender norms** and discrimination; (structural) gender inequality; historical injustices and colonial and apartheid legacies that have created structural poverty, unemployment, economic and social inequalities. Related to these are further intersectional factors such as cultural, traditional **and religious practices**; social norms; exposure to childhood violence; level of education; substance abuse and the ability to navigate mental health challenges, amongst others.

Grounded in Shared Values

Values and principles of life are the building blocks of all faiths. This Strategy is built on a strong foundation of common values which emerged through listening and robust dialogue during diverse interfaith encounters. These values act to bind people together and enable individuals/groups/communities/organisations and

⁷ Examples of faith-based organisations and churches that have been doing exciting work include the Evangelical Church of Southern Africa, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, The Anglican Church of Southern Africa and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, World Vision South Africa, CATHCA, the South African Council of Churches, and at local level, the 7th Day Adventist Church in KwaZulu-Natal Province, and Oasis Church in uMlazi. Further information is available on request.

⁸ Maluleke, R. *Crimes against women in South Africa: an analysis of the phenomenon of GBV and femicide in South Africa*. StatisticsSouth Africa, PPT presentation. https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/1_Stock/Events_Institutional/2020/womens_charter_2020/docs/30-07-2020/A_Statistical_Overview_R_Maluleke.pdf (Last accessed: 21 March 2022)

⁹ Maluleke, R. (2018). *Crime Against Women in South Africa, An in-depth Analysis of the Victims of Crime Survey Data*, Report 03-40-5. Statistics South Africa. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-40-05/Report-03-40-05June2018.pdf> (Last accessed: 21 March 2022)

¹⁰ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2024-08-30-crimes-against-women-rise-many-rapes-happened-in-schools-saps-crime-stats/>

¹¹ Minisini, V. (Posted on 21 March 2021). South Africa's Secondary Pandemic: A Crisis of Gender Based Violence. Global Risk Insights. <https://globalriskinsights.com/2021/03/south-africas-secondary-pandemic-a-crisis-of-gender-based-violence/#:~:text=Prior%20to%20the%20pandemic%2C%20femicide,World%20Health%20Organisation%20in%202016.> (Last accessed: 21 March 2022)

¹² Quoted in: Daniela Gennrich, 2021. "COVID-19, Gender-Based Violence and the Church: A Church Gender Activist's Reflections". In: Hadebe, N; Gennrich, D; Rakoczy, S and Tom, N. 2021. A Time Like No Other: COVID-19 in Women's Voices. Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

society as a whole, to imagine a better world. These values challenge people to recognise that the HOW of doing things is as important as the WHY or the WHAT. These shared values include love, oneness, equal dignity, equity, peace, justice and mercy. They can be summed up in a holistic understanding of the African philosophy of UBUNTU (*'I am because you are'*). These values and the understanding of UBUNTU underpin the view that no form of violence can be justified or supported in the light of a community or society's shared values.

Problem review

Four key problem areas be addressed by this strategy include:

- Elements of different religions and beliefs have been shown to hinder GBV prevention and/or response efforts, and even perpetuate GBV through certain interpretations of religious texts and practices of faith-based traditions and rituals.
- While there are many positive aspects of faith-based work being done for GBV mitigation, this work in some (if not many) cases, takes place in isolation and is not integrated into collective efforts. This indicates the need for an organised and collective 'voice' supported by effective advocacy.
- Where life-affirming religious discourses or new campaigns exist, or where national or religious leadership articulate new inclusive and liberatory gender norms, these can take time to filter to local level congregations and their leaders (if at all they do).
- There is a need to strengthen efforts to mainstream more life-giving norms within the faith sector itself and to mainstream the faith sector contribution into the national GBV mitigation processes.

Considering these four key problems within a framework of 'Strengths', 'Shortcomings', 'Priorities', 'Areas for growth and opportunity' and 'Risk', (referred to as the SSPAR framework) has guided the articulation of this Strategy so that it continues (to accelerate and amplify), adjusts or (newly) activates work already being done in the faith sector.

The Strategy 2024 – 2030

During numerous collaborations and workshops, five areas were identified to address the challenges (in the problem review) and achieve outcomes (as per the Theory of Change) using the SSPA framework. They included:

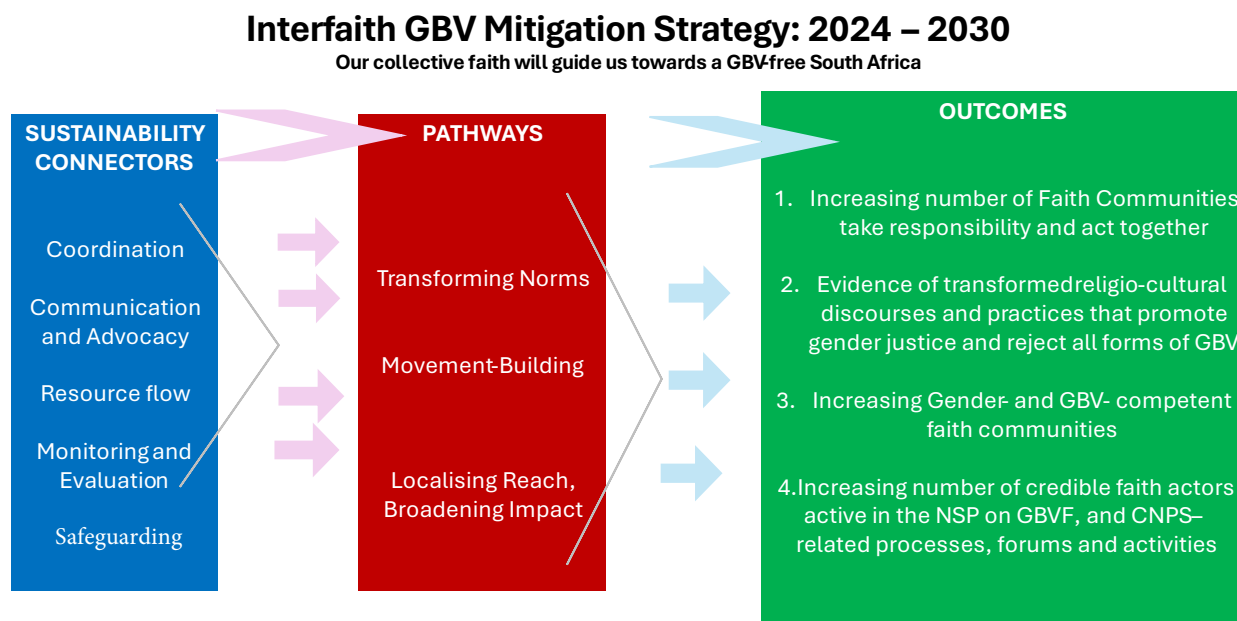
1. **Shifting the narrative:** Transforming harmful social/religious/cultural norms
2. **Movement-building and Advocacy:** Inclusion, networking and partnership building
3. **Localising Efforts and Impact:** Collaborating closely with local partners and building **safe** faith communities
4. **Sustainability:** Resources and momentum
5. **Coordination and communication**

Once these five areas were analysed further, three of them presented as Strategic Pathways to effectively navigate the challenges and pave the way to achieve outcomes:

- Pathway 1: Transforming Norms**
- Pathway 2: Movement-Building**
- Pathway 3: Localising Efforts & Impact**

The core elements listed under Thematic areas 4 and 5 above (**Advocacy, Coordination and Communication, and Sustainability** (both financial and human – through ensuring Resource Mobilisation)), along with robust monitoring and evaluation (**M&E**), emerged as key connectors to ensure the sustained success of the pathways, and are thus referred to as the Strategy’s ‘Sustainability Connectors’. These sustainability connectors will facilitate effective coordination and capacitation for implementation of the Strategy. They will act as the ‘glue’ that unites interfaith efforts internally, and with other (non-faith-based sector) initiatives and processes both nationally and locally.

The crux of the Strategy is illustrated below:



Amplify the sustainability connectors to accelerate and strengthen pathways to achieve Interfaith outcomes contributing to the goals of the NSP on GBVF, and the CNPS

Policy and Strategy Environment

This Prevention and Mitigation Strategy is based on national, regional and international policies and strategies including: the NSP on GBVF, the Comprehensive National Prevention Strategy (CNPS), the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the SADC Regional GBV Strategy and Framework for Action 2019 - 2030 and the SADC Parliamentary Forum (PF) Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These protocols are strong advocacy tools that the faith sector can use to mobilise leaders and leadership processes to mitigate GBV, and to strengthen accountability and responsibility amongst faith-based leadership.

Way forward

This strategic framework cannot stand alone, and 3 further steps have begun to ground it in concrete actionable joint initiatives and independent actions amongst faith sector stakeholders, and holding every

person and organisation involved accountable to one another, its people and to the Almighty, compassionate One for whom every person is of equal value.

-Develop a robust
M&E Framework

-Develop short- and medium-term
Action Plans for each pathway-

-Establish Sub-Committees for actioning
each of the pathways-

This strategy invites all faith sector actors to be inspired to locate their own contributions, alone and with others, to achieve the shared faith sector vision of an inclusive society free from GBV and Femicide.

The Interfaith Sector GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy (2024-2030) provides a robust framework for mobilizing faith communities in South Africa to effectively address GBV within the faith sector itself, and contribute meaningfully to GBV prevention and mitigation efforts across the country. The strengths of the Interfaith Strategy lie in its: holistic engagement with religious leaders and faith communities; emphasis on survivors; and commitment to seek out and establish shared accountability and shared responsibility for GBV across all faiths. However, the strategy faces challenges, including resistance from conservative religious sectors, resource constraints, and unclear accountability mechanisms. To succeed, it will need to navigate these obstacles carefully, ensuring that it remains inclusive, well-resourced, and aligned with the diverse realities of South African faith communities.

FULL STRATEGIC PLAN

Introduction & Background

The Interfaith GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy 2024 – 2030, has its roots in an organic consultation process amongst diverse scholars, activists and leaders, as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the faith sector, that originally began as early as 2013. It constitutes an attempt to unite a growing faith sector movement that has recognised the seriousness of gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms, including femicide, as perhaps the most fundamental and enduring social challenge in South Africa today. (It is important to note that ‘GBV’, in the case of this Strategy, includes femicide.)

This document is unique in three ways:

- Firstly, it is based on the premise that the faith sector itself has to transform before it can become a credible stakeholder in the whole-society approach outlined in the National Strategic Plan on GBV and Femicide (NSP on GBVF)¹³.
- Secondly, while it is a sector-specific strategy, its perspective is intersectional as it understands gender inequality and vulnerability to GBV to be influenced by many intersecting social power dynamics and thus requires the faith sector to collaborate widely with other sectors.
- Thirdly, it is based on a recognition of the profound ideological influence of the faith sector on social and cultural norms and practices that, despite its negative history, has powerful potential to be harnessed for social transformation.

This GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy is the second one developed by the faith sector. It is the result of an intense collaborative process amongst scholars, activists, survivors and some faith leaders actively involved in social justice work since February 2024, including a Google survey, regular monthly meetings, workshops and most recently, a Strategy Development Workshop (with supplementing monthly sessions) where participants have contributed directly to shaping this document.

The strategic planning process has been led and hosted (on behalf of partners) by two faith sector formations that have grown in influence in the GBV sector recently: the Faith Action Collective to End GBV (Faith Action) and We Will Speak Out South Africa (WWSOSA). Faith Action, as an interfaith Collective formed specifically to unite those in the broader faith sector with an interest in equipping the sector to become more effective in addressing GBV and femicide in South Africa, is to act as the vehicle to unite and mobilise the interfaith sector in taking this strategy forward. As a statutory organisation, WWSOSA acts as coordinating Secretariat and fiduciary host to Faith Action.

The Faith Action Collective to End GBV was formed in June 2020, approximately 50 faith leaders met online to discuss shared concerns on the increasing levels of femicides, sexual and domestic violence, and unwanted pregnancies during COVID-19 lockdown, levels 5 and 4. Linked to this were discussions on how the faith sector could contribute to the then newly-launched NSP on GBVF. This forum was jointly convened by UN Women

¹³ The National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide 2020 – 2030. 2020. <https://www.justice.gov.za/vg/gbv/nsp-gbvfinal-final-doc-04-05.pdf>

(South Africa) and Sonke Gender Justice with support from the South African Council of Churches. It led to a series of meetings over the next few months of a smaller core of faith leaders, scholars and activists. This resulted in agreement on a common goal, objectives and the nature of a structure that might enable improved collaboration amongst faith sector actors. The intent was to mobilise the broader faith sector to break the silence around GBV and to respond more urgently and effectively to it, alongside COVID-19.

While the early partners were mostly of the Christian faith, this began to change during 2022. Currently Faith Action includes partners from eight faiths: African Traditional, Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Several partners are also from the NGO and Government sectors. With all the collective diversity, the Collective has committed to unite around the same agenda – *to mobilise and equip the faith sector to address GBV more effectively.*

It is important to note that this is not a new organisation and does not replace what faith-based partners are already doing as individuals and organisations. Rather, the Collective creates opportunities for joint reflection, to learn from each other's work, envision and plan joint initiatives including campaigns, together. Monthly online meetings are used as an accountability platform as well as a shared learning and networking forum, where joint projects are reported, and feedback and further involvement is sought. The Collective strengthens a unified faith response to GBV. Over the last four years, Faith Action has grown in its work and reach through the creative and diverse contributions of key partners and some timely seed funding. In the past two years over 500 people have registered for the monthly meetings and other learning platforms, with up to 40 people attending meetings in some instances.

We Will Speak Out South Africa (WWSOSA) was the first attempt at uniting the faith sector in South Africa for the long-term to address GBV more effectively. It was founded in 2013 in response to the findings of a Tear Fund research study¹⁴ showing that GBV survivors felt deeply let down by their religious leaders. WWSOSA is committed to a survivor-informed approach. It believes that a united and effective response from the faith sector will play a pivotal part in ending GBV in South Africa by contributing to the objectives of the NSP on GBV and the Comprehensive National GBV Prevention Strategy (CNPS)¹⁵. WWSOSA is one of Faith Action's founding partners (2020). In 2021, Faith Action requested WWSOSA to act as Holding Partner for joint funding proposals. WWSOSA has been formally providing Secretariat and Coordination services for the Faith Action Collective since mid-2023. WWSOSA comprises more than 200 members including individuals (such as faith leaders and GBV survivors), organisations and church groups. Between Faith Action and WWSOSA, the two formations now (September 2024) have over 900 subscribers.

¹⁴ BREAKING THE SILENCE A needs assessment of survivors of sexual violence in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. 2023. <https://learn.tearfund.org/-/media/learn/resources/reports/breaking-the-silence-executive-summary-final.pdf>

¹⁵ Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. The Comprehensive National Prevention Strategy. (approved by the Minister of Women Children and Persons with Disabilities in March 2019).

The interfaith Sector in South Africa

A 2022 census report indicates that approximately 96% of South Africa's population identify as religious.¹⁶ Below is a breakdown of the religious affiliations as per the Statistics South Africa report:

Religious belief/affiliation	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	SA
Christianity	85,6	86,1	97,8	92,7	74,9	95,5	86,1	89,1	86,8	85,3
Islam	5,2	0,6	0,8	0,5	1,9	0,3	1,6	0,5	0,5	1,6
Traditional African	5,3	11,0	0,7	4,9	13,6	2,3	6,0	7,8	6,3	7,8
Hinduism	0,2	0,1	0,0	0,0	4,2	0,0	0,7	0,1	0,0	1,1
Buddhism	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Judaism	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,1
Atheism	0,3	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,1
Agnosticism	0,3	0,1	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,1
No religious affiliation	2,0	1,3	0,3	1,3	3,4	1,2	4,1	1,8	5,1	2,9
Other	0,8	0,6	0,4	0,4	1,8	0,5	1,1	0,6	1,1	1,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Note: Totals may not add up to 100 because of smaller figures that do not appear as a result of the one decimal place.

What has/is being done by the Faith Sector to promote development?

As part of the broader civil society sector, faith-based organisations (FBOs) have a long history of playing significant roles in local community development in various ways¹⁷ including, but not limited to GBV primary (early intervention) and secondary prevention (response). The faith sector provides essential social services and welfare programmes to meet the needs of vulnerable groups within their communities including food security programmes, shelters for the homeless, healthcare clinics, counselling services, and educational programmes. The sector also engages in other social justice initiatives, including: disaster response and relief efforts; poverty alleviation initiatives; awareness and advocacy promoting values such as justice and human dignity, compassion, forgiveness, and social responsibility; moral, spiritual and psychosocial support; and promoting interfaith dialogue – all of which contributes to community building by fostering social cohesion.

Long-standing GBV-related faith initiatives

It is important to acknowledge that gender justice work and efforts to address GBV began long before the founding of WWSOSA in 2013. Various faith groups were attempting to address this issue in their local faith contexts and communities. Many of these efforts were innovative and there is evidence of them being effective. Below are a few examples:

¹⁶ Statistics South Africa; Census 2022: Statistical Release P0301.4. 2022.

https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.leadershiponline.co.za/the-role-of-faith-based-organisations-in-social-development-in-south-africa/>

- The Baha’i movement as well as the Brahma Kumaris have always been guided by their sacred texts insisting on the importance of gender equality as essential to human wellbeing and as a prerequisite for human development.
- From the Christian Faith:
 - The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) has had a gender portfolio since before 2003, with initial focus on the full inclusion of women in leadership in the church. A more intense GBV focus gained momentum in 2014. The Mothers’ Union allocated funding towards a gender desk, which conducted a baseline and produced a strategic plan. This initiative was hampered by inconsistent resourcing. As such, in 2016, the portfolio was allocated to Hope Africa, which has worked to establish gender desks in all 22 dioceses across 5 countries in Southern Africa. In 2018, a Safe and Inclusive Church Commission was established, which specifically addresses internal abuse cases across all dioceses with the long term aim to make all its institutions safe and inclusive. ACSA was directly involved in the establishment of WWSOSA in 2013, with Archbishop Thabo as Keynote speaker at its launch in November, and it continues to be a key partner in the Faith Action Collective.
 - Several Christian churches (e.g. Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, and Liberating Evangelical Churches) have established networks of regional gender coordinators to work in a more coordinated way.
 - The South African Faith and Family Institute in the Western Cape was established in 2008 with a strong focus on developing an effective domestic violence training programme for Christian clergy, which it has recently expanded into Africa.
- The Hindu Arya Samaj’s Women’s Movement started operating a shelter for abused women in KZN as early as the late 1980s, which has grown over the years, Increasing number of women have recently been licensed as punditas in the South African Arya Samaj. In response to their involvement in the Faith Action Campaign in 2023, GBV has been adopted as a key priority by the Maha Sabha (coordinating body of 3 major Hindu sects in South Africa).
- The Ikhwelo Traditional Leaders Association has for some time advocated in the African traditional healer sector for cases of sexual abuse during the training of initiates to be challenged and pursued in law.
- Muslim religious institutions and welfare bodies are integrated into civil society and thus have a role to play in GBV prevention and mitigation work. For example, the Claremont Main Road Mosque in the Western Cape, has a sexual harassment framework for Imams and congregations.

These efforts are of pivotal importance in GBV prevention and mitigation and it is vital for the faith sector to build on these and other good practice examples.

Roadblocks and Progress

What had been lacking until recently, however, is a systemic and structured process to harness and unite all this work through collectives like WWSOSA and Faith Action. Building a unified and diverse movement that brings the different faiths’ work together and presents a platform to build on lessons, share good practice and leverage collective resources, should significantly increase the overall impact of the faith sector’s work. It has taken a long time for other stakeholders in the country to recognise that the faith sector has and can play a

very important role in the implementation of the NSP on GBVF. (It has taken long for the faith-sector to build this recognition and trust due to its reputation of being incapable or unwilling to deal with GBV-related issues largely due to the patriarchal traditions that have influenced most of the sector, particularly the monotheistic religions.)

This was still clear at the first National Presidential Summit on GBV in 2019, where the faith sector was strikingly invisible. However, in 2022, after the establishment of Faith Action, and WWSOSA's submission to the early drafts of the NSP on GBVF, there was clear recognition of the important role the faith sector can and might be beginning to play as a key stakeholder rather than a perpetrator of GBV.

The 2nd Presidential Summit on GBVF 2022

Members of the faith sector were invited to the Summit through the Faith Action and WWSOSA and were highly visible at the event. They participated in Summit preparation working groups, represented the Faith sector at a plenary session on Accountability, facilitated a Faith Sector Action Caucus, and, in partnership with Heartlines, hosted a Faith Collective exhibition stand. President Cyril Ramaphosa and the Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Ms Maite Nkoane-Mashabane, engaged with representatives at the exhibition, indicating growing high-level recognition of the sector's role. There was an open call by WWSOSA to participants, inviting them to join the growing faith movement to address religious drivers of GBV. The Faith Sector Action Caucus, represented by 30 delegates from five different faiths, presented a number of key Resolutions which were adopted into the Pillar 1 Accountability Resolution which reads as follows:

“to establish shared ethical values founded on standards for mutual accountability within the faith based sector and build its capacity to (i) support survivors of GBV against perpetrators; (ii) dismantle patriarchy from religious teachings and practices, whilst integrating more women into senior leadership roles; and (iii) strengthen spiritual healing and restorative justice, whilst eradicating all forms of spiritual abuse.”

The Faith Leaders Gender Transformation Programme

A flagship outcome of the collaboration between WWSOSA and almost 20 partners of Faith Action has been an innovative 10-month accompaniment programme, the Faith Leaders Gender Transformation Programme (FLGTP). It aims to equip faith leaders to become agents of institutional transformation and challenge entrenched patriarchal norms and behaviours. The programme is founded on feminist and other liberation theological knowledge and a deeper understanding of how participants' own gendered past has shaped their stance on gender issues. This has allowed participating faith leaders to undertake a gender analysis of their faith organisation and to take gradual steps towards equipping their institutions to address GBV and related issues. In some cases, faith leaders have had to consider concrete ways to transform as institutions. Three pilots have been completed over the past three years (2021 – 2024), producing over 50 graduates with anticipated indirect reach of over 5000 congregants and community members.^{18 19}

¹⁸ Based on the assumptions that one congregational faith leader's sphere of influence reaches at least 100 persons.

¹⁹ An independent Outcomes Harvesting study has been documenting some key 'stories of challenge and change' due to be published by WWSOSA in 2024.

The Joint Interfaith Statement of Commitment

In November 2023, after almost two years of informal and formal consultative processes amongst scholars, activists and leaders from diverse religious traditions, Faith Action launched a Joint Interfaith Statement of Commitment²⁰ and ran a Signature Campaign, garnering almost 700 signatories. This award-winning initiative,²¹ considered as a ground-breaking mobilisation campaign and historic move by the interfaith sector in South Africa,²² brought together faith representatives from eight different faiths: Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i, African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Buddhism, Brahma Kumaris, and Christianity. The aim of the campaign is to mobilise widespread support and commitment to practical action to support the NSP on GBVF, contributing to the whole society approach to eradicating GBV as envisaged in the NSP on GBVF. The primary message from this Faith Action initiative is *'...the Faith Action Collective's commitment to combating GBV transcends religious boundaries, underscoring the power of unity in addressing societal challenges.'*²³

What is the role of Religion in GBV?

*'...For people of faith, this faith identity is core to the development of many of the laws, policies, programmes and relationships which shape and govern the societies in which we all live. The potentially transformational role of faith leaders and people of faith in tackling root causes of gender inequality and speaking out against gender injustice, raising the issue as a political as well as moral concern, is often not fully appreciated.'*²⁴

Unfortunately, the faith sector has a history of being reluctant and slow to address social issues related to sexuality, GBV and gender justice issues. For instance, it took several years of internal advocacy to move the Christian churches away from vilifying people living with HIV as 'sexual sinners' to many churches now recognising that 'the body of Christ has AIDS'²⁵ and establishing effective HIV ministries. Unfortunately, many churches in Africa and South Africa continue to do the same to people who do not fit heterosexual norms. And both people living with HIV and those who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ have been victims of different forms of violence, whether physical, sexual or verbal abuse and exclusion. In both scenarios, selected biblical texts have been misused to justify these attitudes and actions, which has recently become recognised as a form of 'spiritual abuse'.²⁶ What is needed is consistent and resilient scholarship and advocacy to engender ideological change rooted in deep-seated patriarchal belief systems.

There are many stories, documented or undocumented, of survivors of GBV who have spoken up about being silenced, blamed or stigmatised in other ways, as a result of the faith sector denying the existence of GBV amongst its members. This has been justified through misuse of sacred texts or sometimes actively protecting perpetrators who are leaders or who support faith-related institutions financially.

²⁰ <https://www.wwsosa.org.za/media-statement-interfaith-action-summit/>

²¹ The Collective's project: "Mobilizing and capacitating the Faith Sector as a credible and effective stakeholder in addressing gender-based violence in South Africa" won second prize in GIZ's 2024 Gender Competition amongst all the gender-related projects it supports globally.

²² <https://www.gov.za/news/media-advisories/conferences-summits-seminars-and-workshops/different-faith-groupings-are>

²³ Bhekisisa Mncube. 2023 (article). <https://www.wwsosa.org.za/faith-mission-to-end-gbv/>

²⁴ https://jilflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SbSAdvocacyBrief_Final_2018English.pdf

²⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/48318328_The_body_of_Christ_has_AIDS_a_study_on_the_notion_of_the_body_of_Christ_in_African_theologies_responding_to_HIV_and_AIDS. von Klinken Adriaan, 2008. "The body of Christ has AIDS": a study on the notion of the body of Christ in African theologies responding to HIV and AIDS" In *Missionalia* 36(2):319-336, August 2008, 36(2):319-336

²⁶ <https://sojo.net/articles/what-spiritual-abuse-church-and-how-do-we-heal-it>

While the religious sector continues to have a reputation for its silence, condoning and/or perpetrating various forms of GBV,²⁷ growing numbers of transformative voices are emerging.

These individuals/organisations/movements intentionally resist and expose oppressive teachings and practices. They draw on liberatory elements in their sacred texts and a sense of moral obligation to bring abundant life to all regardless of who they are.²⁸

With over 84% of the world's population self-identifying as members of a faith group, Faith leaders play a key role in '*...shaping people's values, norms of acceptable behaviour, life roles and understanding of what constitutes 'a good life'. There is thus increasing recognition by governance institutions that the faith sector has a critical role to play in addressing primary, secondary and tertiary GBV prevention.*'²⁹ This is an important time in South Africa for the faith sector to build its capacity and become more credible in being able to make a potentially profound impact in the growing movement to end GBV.

Spiritual Abuse

It is important to note that an emerging theme in GBV discourse in South Africa and internationally is 'spiritual abuse'. The term that has gained traction over the past few years in that it offers some insight into a particularly pernicious aspect of the destructive potential of the faith sector to entrench and condone other forms of abuse by justifying them using their spiritual authority. This Strategy consolidates and utilises the following definitions of spiritual abuse taken from a 2023 analysis on the subject³⁰:

"Spiritual abuse has been defined as a distortion and exploitation of spiritual authority to manipulate, control, use, or harm others, mostly through shame and fear". The author goes on to say that "warning signs of spiritual abuse include intolerance for questions and doubts, using the Bible to arouse fear and rigid "us vs. them" binaries, and leaders who demand unwavering loyalty, often threatening anyone who doesn't comply with being cut off from the community or God. Spiritual abuse can also look like a leader who offers above-and-beyond care, but in ways that cross ethical, emotional, or spiritual boundaries. ...This is a whole pattern of behaviour. ...It's not just a person or one institution. There's something about the structures and about the ways in which we give power and empower certain spiritual authorities."

'Spiritual abuse' tends to be a form of violence that supports other forms of GBV, enabling and/or normalising them in a faith context. The author further notes that '*...it is this form of violence that makes the faith sector so dangerous, and dismantling the normalised power accorded to spiritual authorities is a critical component of institutional transformation in the interests of creating safety in religious spaces.*'

²⁷ Chisale, S. S. (2020). 'Deliver us from patriarchy': A gendered perspective of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and implications for pastoral care. *Verbum et ecclesia*, 41(1), 1-8.

²⁸ Examples of other faith-based organisations and churches that have been doing exciting work include the Evangelical Church of Southern Africa, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, The Anglican Church of Southern Africa and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, World Vision South Africa, CATHCA, the South African Council of Churches, and at local level, the 7th Day Adventist Church in KwaZulu-Natal Province, and Oasis Church in uMlazi. Further information is available on request.

²⁹ Side by Side Advocacy Brief: The Role of Faith Leaders in Achieving Gender Justice. 2018. //jilflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SbSAdvocacyBrief_Final_2018English.pdf

³⁰What is Spiritual Abuse? And How Do We Heal From It? Healing from Spiritual Abuse. 2023: <https://sojo.net/articles/what-spiritual-abuse-church-and-how-do-we-heal-it>

This insidious form of abuse [spiritual abuse] is often overlooked but is highly relevant in religious communities, where survivors may feel compelled to remain silent due to fear of spiritual condemnation or exclusion. Addressing spiritual abuse requires:

- Training faith leaders to recognize and end this type of abuse within their congregations.
- Ensuring that religious doctrines are not weaponized to justify or perpetuate GBV.
- Ensuring that faith leaders are held accountable when accused of abuse themselves.

Why the faith sector?

- National Census statistics show that over 95% of South Africa's population self-identify as religious.
- Given the weekly captive audience enjoyed by faith communities (at religious services), faith-based institutions continue to exert a great deal of influence over people's attitudes and behaviours.
- Religious institutions have many assets including their widespread social support networks and ubiquitous infrastructure, and religious leaders continue to enjoy widespread public trust and respect.
- Perhaps the most important uniqueness of the faith sector is its spiritual capital and perceived moral authority, which, if used to promote positive life-giving values and practices, can contribute to Social transformation and become part of the solution.

Religion and GBV: The Evidence

Diverse religious scholars³¹ have identified both oppressive and liberatory elements in most sacred texts and religious traditions in relation to gender justice and GBV. Their work shows how the liberatory trajectories in all faiths have (in the past) and continue to influence faith communities to shift damaging religious and socio-cultural assumptions and oppressive practices. This has begun to pave the way for faith leaders and communities to shift their historically dominant patriarchal teachings and practices, and in turn use their ideological influence to influence and transform wider social norms and practices. In this way, the faith sector can become credible and effective contributors to multi-stakeholder efforts to end GBV and mitigate its current impacts.

Research and lived experience have shown that religion can act as both a 'protective' and/or 'risk' factor for GBV perpetration and mitigation. A 2023 study looking at relationship between GBV and religion and forced displacement³² indicated the following: *"Religious beliefs were assets in coping with GBV experiences, but also contributed to creating an environment in which violence was normalized, exposing women to further harm. Religious practices supported survivors emotionally to cope with GBV but also some practices posed risks. Religious organizations in many cases served as a lifeline for many displaced women, offering practical and emotional support, however religious leaders at times encouraged survivors to stay in abusive relationships. Religious experiences 'empowered' and 'disempowered' survivors across the processes of forced migration."*

³¹ These include scholars such as Mercy Oduyoye, Musa Dube and Nontando Hadebe, leaders in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, an active partner in the Faith Action to End GBV Collective.

³² Gender-based violence, religion and forced displacement: Protective and Risk Factors. S. Pertek et al. March 2023. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fhumd.2023.1058822/full#:~:text=Religion%20acted%20as%20both%20a,exposing%20women%20to%20further%20harm.>

A 2005 study³³ made a similar finding, stating that: *'...to adequately respond to the needs of battered women and rape victims, it is imperative that clergy learn about domestic violence and reach out to secular advocates and services. Likewise, it is imperative that secular advocates and counsellors appreciate the importance of women's religious backgrounds and reach out to clergy and religious groups to find resources to meet the needs of victims. Ill-informed religious leaders or advocates can present major roadblocks to victims of violence.'*

These findings point to a two-fold approach that is key to take into account if the interfaith sector GBV movement is to achieve the developmental goal of transformed gender- and GBV-competent faith communities: 1) to recognise that religious beliefs, texts, and teachings can serve both as roadblocks and as resources for victims of violence; and 2) to deepen the examination of religious texts and teachings and explore new interpretations so that the roadblocks can be minimised and resources for women can be maximised. The important lesson identified is that: *"...no woman should ever be forced to choose between safety and her religious community or tradition. She should be able to access the resources of both community-based advocacy and shelter and faith-based support and counsel. For her to do so, she needs these two resources to work collaboratively so that they can provide consistent advocacy and support for victims and survivors and participate in the process of holding perpetrators accountable."*

The 2013 Tearfund research, which highlighted the negative experience of sexual abuse survivors with their churches (which prompted the establishment of WWSOSA), is another germinal study. Internal recommendations include the need to admit that sexual violence (SV) is taking place within the church, and to develop training and support programmes for church leaders as role models. The study also pointed to a pressing need to mainstream gender, address sector fragmentation so that churches can become agents of change, and the need to make sexual violence a theological concern rather than just a pastoral one. Intra-faith recommendations noted that it is necessary that faith leaders speak up, challenge misogynistic language and, for those with a history of abuse, to recognise their own woundedness and seek psycho-social support. Externally-related recommendations include ensuring that SV interventions involve the whole community, partnering with other service providers, becoming allies of survivors and countering stigma directly, addressing sexual violence in families, addressing alcohol, drugs and poverty as additional factors, and combining prayer with meaningful action.

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) commissioned research to look at the roles religious actors have played in advancing and hindering gender equality since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995.³⁴ The gender themes covered in this report mirrored the targets under the Sustainable Development Goal 5 *'To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'*. To overcome barriers to achieving SDG 5 in religious contexts, the report identified: *'...choosing partners who are leaders on gender issues in their contexts, encouraging religious literacy, and conducting comprehensive gender analyses prior to projects and partnerships.'* The report acknowledged religious actors as change agents, service providers, peacemakers, behaviour changers, social mobilisers, gatekeepers, advocates, influencers, and leaders with credibility.

³³ Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion. Rev M. Fortune and Rabbi C.G. Enger. 2005. https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/AR_VAWReligion_0.pdf

³⁴ <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/>

In an Interfaith Brief on Gender-Based Violence Brief led by Faith to Action and Act Ubumbano,³⁵ faith leaders from five religious traditions in Southern Africa agreed that the faith sector has not been as proactive in responding to GBV as they should have been, noting that ‘...we can no longer remain silent, nor assume that gender-based violence is a ‘private issue.’ It is in many instances a matter of life and death; a matter of human security, dignity, faith, human rights and is key to the prosperity of entire nations.’ In the context of GBV, the faith leaders accepted the misuse of sacred texts to justify patriarchy and male dominance. They agreed that this needs to be countered by recovering the many other parts of sacred texts that speak against violence and abuse of power and that speak in support of equal dignity, peace, justice and healing, and a world in which every human being is of equal value. The following strategies were identified that can enhance the overall response to the epidemic: deepen and popularise the concept that all human beings are created equal; resist domination and power with creativity and courage; promote mutual learning; promote interaction with organisations addressing GBV; and support research and documentation of faith-based responses to GBV.

GBV Landscape

What is GBV?

The NSP on GBV defines GBV as *‘the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with the gender associated with the sex assigned to a person at birth, as well as the unequal power relations between the genders, within the context of a specific society. GBV includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse or threats of such acts or abuse, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation whether occurring in public or private life, in peacetime and during armed or other forms of conflict, and may cause physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic harm.’*

This definition implicitly includes spiritual violence, technology-facilitated GBV (online pornography, GBV in gaming content etc) and other forms of violence that are being increasingly recognised by communities and stakeholders as definitive forms of GBV. As stated earlier, for the purposes of this Strategy, GBV includes femicide: *‘Femicide is the killing of a female person, or perceived as a female person on the basis of gender identity, whether committed within the domestic relationship, interpersonal relationship or by any other person, or whether perpetrated or tolerated by the State or its agents and private intimate femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate partners, i.e. a current or former husband or boyfriend, same-sex partner, or a rejected would-be lover.’*

What is GBV Prevention?

There is no South African definition for ‘GBV prevention’. As such, the Faith Action Collective will lean on the Comprehensive National GBV Prevention Strategy (CNPS), which has used the definitions for ‘violence prevention’ as a guide. It (violence prevention) is a complex issue and has been defined differently in various legislations and policies, though some common ideas can be identified. The CNPS has collated the definitions and descriptions drawn from the NSP on GBV, the Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy (ICVPS) and the Violence Prevention Forum (VPF) to develop and utilise the following broad understanding of GBV prevention:

³⁵ <https://faithtoactionnetwork.org/2022/05/09/interfaith-brief-on-srhr-sadc/>

'GBV prevention is the whole of society working together to address the range of drivers that perpetuate or sustain gender-based violence, femicide and the normalisation of GBV. It comprises strategies and measures (including but not limited to policies, interventions, evidence use) that seek to reduce both the risk of GBV occurring and reoccurring, and the harmful effects on individuals, families and communities. GBV prevention is a concerted, collective and systematic effort to remove sources of harm and inequality, nurture healing, build caring communities and restore social cohesion.'

The Context of GBV in South Africa and its relevance to the faith sector

There is an existing high prevalence of GBV in South Africa. According to Statistics South Africa (2016), 21% (one in five) partnered women has experienced physical violence by a partner.³⁶ Statistics SA also notes that this country's incidence of rape is among the highest in the world.³⁷ Rape statistics³⁸ just for the period Jan-June 2024 reached 18,561, translating into 3,093 incidences of rape per month or 103 per day and over 4 every hour. Sixty percent (60%) of all rapes take place in homes and many take place in schools. Crime statistics show that in 2019/20, a total of 2,695 women were murdered in South Africa. This translates to a woman being murdered every 3 hours, ranking femicide in this country as the fourth highest in the world.³⁹

Globally, UN Women states that an estimated 30% of women globally, aged 15 years and older, have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV), non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life.⁴⁰ (This does not include sexual harassment.) Of these women, 26% have experienced IPV perpetrated by their current or former husbands or intimate partners. The rates of depression, anxiety disorders, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV are higher in women who have experienced violence compared to women who have not. In many cases, these and other health problems can last long after the violence has ended.

The highest prevalence of intimate partner violence was reported in the African region, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (65.64%).⁴¹

Unfortunately, no global or South African statistics exist for the levels of GBV within the faith sector itself, although some local studies have surfaced the prevalence of domestic violence in clergy marriages.⁴² This reality is expressed in the following quote:

³⁶ Maluleke, R. *Crimes against women in South Africa: an analysis of the phenomenon of GBV and femicide in South Africa*. StatisticsSouth Africa, PPT presentation. https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/1_Stock/Events_Institutional/2020/womens_charter_2020/docs/30-07-2020/A_Statistical_Overview_R_Maluleke.pdf (Last accessed: 21 March 2022)

³⁷ Maluleke, R. (2018). *Crime Against Women in South Africa, An in-depth Analysis of the Victims of Crime Survey Data*, Report 03-40-5. Statistics South Africa. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-40-05/Report-03-40-05June2018.pdf> (Last accessed: 21 March 2022)

³⁸ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2024-08-30-crimes-against-women-rise-many-rapes-happened-in-schools-saps-crime-stats/>

³⁹ Minisini, V. (Posted on 21 March 2021). South Africa's Secondary Pandemic: A Crisis of Gender Based Violence. Global Risk Insights. <https://globalriskinsights.com/2021/03/south-africas-secondary-pandemic-a-crisis-of-gender-based-violence/#:~:text=Prior%20to%20the%20pandemic%2C%20femicide,World%20Health%20Organisation%20in%202016.> (Last accessed: 21 March 2022)

⁴⁰ https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiA67CrBhC1ARIsACKAa8S4OvKrLX0wII7l_fRCB5wSWZPkfTrB8aep00ashC2_ZbGO2Rk16aUaAr5JEALw_wcB#83926

⁴¹ Gender-based violence among female youths in educational institutions of Sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis, 2019. (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13643-019-0969-9>)

⁴² Isabel A Phiri, 2001. "Domestic Violence in Christian Homes: A Durban Case Study" *Journal for the Study of Religion* 14(2) February 2001 DOI:10.4314/jsr.v14i2.6147

“[given the national GBV statistics,] if 80% of South Africa’s population are churchgoers and 90% of those who actually go to church are women, then my church consists of many, many survivors. But also of perpetrators. How blind am I to the realities of my congregants? What does that mean for my ministry? We have to change our church culture, even if it becomes something different.” (Bishop Nkosinathi Zondi, Truevine Community Church.)⁴³

As recognised in the NSP on GBVF, the CNPS and various research findings (local and international), the most prevalent drivers of GBV include social, cultural **and religious gender norms** and discrimination; (structural) gender inequality; (historical injustices that have created) structural poverty and unemployment; economic and social inequality; cultural, traditional **and religious practices**; social norms; exposure to childhood violence; level of education; substance abuse and the ability to navigate mental health challenges; pornography, especially child pornography; climate change; epidemics and pandemics (as seen with COVID 19); amongst others.

In South Africa, the intersection of poverty, unemployment and inequality, exacerbates the vulnerability of affected individuals, families and communities to violence, and hampers efforts to address GBV effectively. Over 50% of South Africa’s population live below the national poverty line. The resulting economic deprivation limits affected people’s access to resources and services, trapping many (especially women and children) in environments where different forms of GBV and violence in general are more prevalent.

While reports highlight that significant strides have been made in gender equality in this country, with, for example, a marked increase in the representation of women in professionally qualified/ middle management positions, there continue to be gender-based disparities in the labour market⁴⁴. While it is widely accepted that economic empowerment is a cornerstone of achieving gender equality, significant gaps that hinder progress remain. In this country, women are more likely to face unemployment and are less likely to participate in the workforce compared to men⁴⁵. This is of mounting concern considering the national unemployment rate of 34.4% in the second quarter of 2024 was the highest amongst 82 countries (as per the global list monitored by Bloomberg)⁴⁶.

In addition to the stifling challenges of poverty and unemployment, South Africa has the highest level of income inequality in the world with a Gini coefficient⁴⁷ of 63 (as measured in 2024)⁴⁸. This stark inequality fuels socio-economic disparities and perpetuates power imbalances that underpin inequality and GBV. Marginalized groups and communities are disproportionately affected by GBV due to systemic inequities and lack or have insufficient access to adequate prevention and response services.

Addressing these drivers is crucial for tackling GBV effectively, as they are deeply intertwined with the

⁴³ Quoted in: Daniela Gennrich, 2021. “COVID-19, Gender-Based Violence and the Church: A Church Gender Activist’s Reflections”. In: Hadebe, N; Gennrich, D; Rakoczy, S and Tom, N. 2021. A Time Like No Other: COVID-19 in Women’s Voices. Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

⁴⁴ [https://www.labour.gov.za/Media-Desk/Media-Statements/Pages/Employment-Equity-\(EE\)-Annual-Report-2023-2024---Employment-Equity-Progress-Report-highlights-the-collaborative-efforts-of-.aspx](https://www.labour.gov.za/Media-Desk/Media-Statements/Pages/Employment-Equity-(EE)-Annual-Report-2023-2024---Employment-Equity-Progress-Report-highlights-the-collaborative-efforts-of-.aspx)

⁴⁵ Statistics South Africa. Gender Series Volume XI: Women Empowerment, 2014–2024. 2024. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-26/Report-03-10-26.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/8/24/south-africas-unemployment-rate-is-now-the-worlds-highest>

⁴⁷ (The Gini coefficient measures the dispersion of income or distribution of wealth among the members of a population.)

⁴⁸ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gini-coefficient-by-country>

incidence and perpetuation of violence in South Africa.

Grounded in Shared Values

Values and principles of life are the building blocks of all faiths. This strategy is thus built on a strong values foundation, which was realised through listening and robust dialogue during diverse interfaith encounters. The values do not negate people's differences but act to bind everyone together in a common foundation. They enable diverse individuals and groups to come together and imagine a different world and challenges everyone to recognise that the HOW doing things is as important as the WHY or the WHAT.

The extract below is taken from the Joint Interfaith Statement of Commitment on GBV:⁴⁹

'...We are a human family that is diverse and unique, composed of many faith traditions that all share some core common values and truths. Some of these essential truths include:

- *LOVE: Showing empathy, understanding and care for all is the shared foundation of all faiths.*
- *ONENESS: We are one species and we need each other to survive and thrive.*
- *EQUAL DIGNITY: We are all God's creation and have a shared right to fairness and EQUITY, PEACE, JUSTICE and MERCY.*

...These values enable restorative healing and can be summed up by the African philosophy of UBUNTU, ('I am because you are'). This philosophy embraces a way of being that acknowledges and celebrates that all humans are deeply interconnected. It encourages GENEROSITY of spirit and enables BELONGING and INCLUSIVITY. Faith Action '...strives to nurture mutual RESPECT, to act justly with COMPASSION and HUMILITY, and to speak TRUTH even when costly. FAITH is crucial and central in the way we understand the basic building blocks of our society. No forms of violence have any support or justification in light of our shared faith values. ... We understand that religious ideals and prayer are inadequate alone. We commit to translating our faith into action.'

The Interfaith Sector GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy: 2024 – 2030

What does GBV Prevention mean for the Faith Sector: A working description

Taking all the above evidence, analysis, literature and lived experiences into account and integrating that with the Joint Interfaith GBV Statement of Commitment,⁵⁰ the following points extracted from the Interfaith Statement sum up what GBV prevention means for the current interfaith strategy:

*Members of the faith sector jointly and personally commit to actively, intentionally and collaboratively supporting efforts to mitigate GBV by:*⁵¹

- ❖ *Including spiritual abuse as a type of GBV and developing appropriate (and where possible – intersectional) interventions as part of broader GBV mitigation efforts;*

⁴⁹ Executive Summary of the Interfaith Statement of Commitment on GBV, p.3

⁵⁰ https://www.faiht2endgbv.org.za/images/Draft_Interfaith_Statement_of_Commitment_-_full_version_1.pdf

⁵¹ <https://www.wwsosa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/Interfaith-Statement-of-Commitment-Exec-Summary.pdf> (adapted and summarised)

- ❖ *Being vocal and transparent about calling out GBV of any kind no matter who is involved, even in the midst of fear of division or intimidation;*
- ❖ *Dismantling the culture where in some cases, religious processes or leaders seek to silence victims/survivors, thereby normalising gender inequity, norms and behaviour;*
- ❖ *Amplifying sacred texts and religious traditions, rituals, ceremonies and symbols that promote the ideals of dignity, gender equality and justice;*
- ❖ *Facilitating change within the faith sector to ensure that sacred texts and religious traditions, rituals, ceremonies and symbols in no way maintain, encourage or propagate gender inequity or GBV in any form;*
- ❖ *Becoming integrally involved in South Africa's multi-sectoral efforts to prevent and respond to GBV including amplifying and accelerating the NSP on GBVF and the CNPS and in general;*
- ❖ *Improving accountability mechanisms, including supporting the diverse faith institutions to develop gender, GBV and safeguarding policies as well as developing a joint policy to guide the sector's collective work.*
- ❖ *Focusing on:*
 - *amplifying the voices and visibility of women and enabling their meaningful participation in efforts to mitigate GBV through the work of the faith-based sector, both as survivors and advocates (talking with them not 'to' or 'about' them);*
 - *working with men and boys in developing positive and transformative masculinities and dismantling toxic behaviour and norms;*
 - *educating families and communities through a social and gender justice lens - this includes 'unlearning' harmful norms, and practising inclusive, equitable and life-giving faith-based values;*
 - *prioritising the protection of vulnerable groups and acknowledging that many face intersectional challenges. Vulnerable groups including (but not limited to) women, children, persons with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ community, the elderly, sex workers, (legal and illegal) migrant women and children; and men who do not fit the dominant heteronormative definitions of 'manhood' that diminish, denigrate and/or seek to control all other expressions of masculinity;*
 - *making places of worship, and faith-based communities and leadership, safe spaces for sanctuary, care, healing and referral;*
 - *Ensuring that appropriate religio-cultural institutional policies and mechanisms exist to sanction abuse of power by faith leaders, and being willing to work with legal institutions, avoiding hiding behind religio-cultural traditions to avoid legal accountability; and*
 - *Working with faith leaders, who are largely men but also some women, as duty bearers in their faith work, using nuanced approaches with GBV-related sensitivity and training.*

Vision

- An *Inclusive Society* in South Africa Free of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

Developmental Goal

Transformed Gender- and GBV-Competent Faith Communities integrally contributing to multi-stakeholder initiatives to achieve the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

Approaches utilised in developing this Strategy

- **Human Rights Framework:** Faith Action embraces the South African Constitution. As such, this Strategy is founded on the Constitution, especially Chapter 2, the Bill of Rights, which speaks specifically to *'...the rights to equality, dignity and life. Civil rights are for example the right to freedom and security of the person and the right to privacy'*.⁵²
- **Faith-values based:** The Strategy and its implementation is based on the shared values of the faith sector including being blessed and guided by God; kindness; compassion and equality.
- **Whole-of-Society:** Faith Action recognised that for GBV prevention and effective mitigation to be achieved and sustained, everyone in all spheres of society need to be engaged and accountable.
- **Shared Accountability and Shared Responsibility:** Linked to the whole-of-society approach, and pivotal to this Strategy is the theme of shared accountability and shared responsibility emphasising that everyone – faith leaders and faith communities alike - are collectively and individually accountable and responsible for preventing and mitigating GBV in their faith environments, household and communities.
- **Theory of Change:** The development of this Strategy is based on Faith Action's existing Theory of Change. The Theory of Change is a roadmap to achieve the South Africa we envision. It recognises that for the Faith sector to be a trusted partner in social change, it has to look inward and live out the values and principles that it is striving for at a national level.
- **Socio-economic model:** This Strategy aligns with the foundational socio-economic model⁵³ approach used in both the NSP on GBVF and the CNPS (and the development sector in general) and especially speaks to the 'community' and 'societal' levels of the model. A strength of the Faith-sector is that it is a part of a larger ecosystem and due to its pervasiveness in most communities, and its ideological influence, the sector has ability to influence all other levels of society – Faith Action takes this ability as a God-given responsibility to support efforts to end GBV in South Africa.
- **Transformative Gender Justice:** The nature of the interfaith collective such as Faith Action is its potential to create a groundswell movement for gender justice within religious communities. By mobilizing faith leaders and members, and FBOs, this Strategy seeks to catalyse a broader societal shift toward gender equality, transforming religious institutions', and thereby the sector's, response to GBV. This is anticipated to have positive impacts in supporting the GBV-related transformative agenda of the NSP on GBVF, and the CNPS.

Outcomes

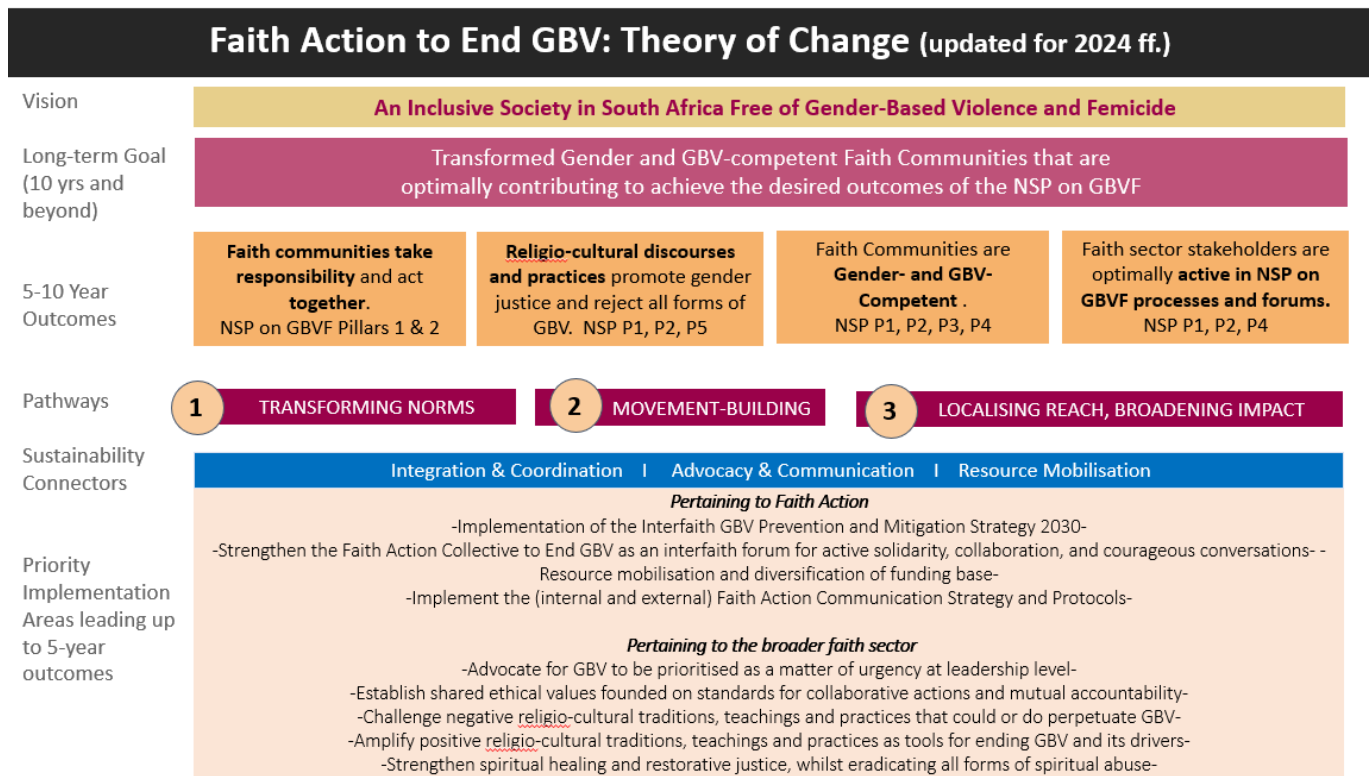
As seen in Faith Action's Theory of Change⁵⁴ below, there are four (5-10 year) outcomes that are directly linked to the Pillars of the NSP on GBV: ((i) Faith communities take responsibility and act together; (ii) Religio-cultural discourses and practices promote gender justice and reject all GBV; (iii) All Faith communities are

⁵² https://www.concourt.org.za/images/phocadownload/the_text/Slimline-Constitution-Web-Version.pdf

⁵³ The socio-ecological model is a way of examining human development by looking at the developing person and the environment and analysing the interaction between the two.

⁵⁴ A Theory of Change explains how the activities undertaken by an intervention (such as a project, programme or policy) contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts.

Gender- and GBV- competent; and (iv) Faith sector stakeholders are optimally active in the NSP on GBVF processes and forums.



Problem Review

Four key problem areas identified by participants in the review process and strategy workshop, corroborated by the evidence described above, include:

- Elements of different religions and beliefs have been shown to hinder GBV prevention and/or response efforts, and even perpetuate GBV through certain interpretations of religious texts and practices of faith-based traditions and rituals.
- While there are many positive aspects of faith-based work being done for GBV mitigation, this work in some (if not many) cases, takes place in isolation and is not integrated into collective efforts. This indicates the need for an organised and collective ‘voice’ supported by effective advocacy.
- Where more inclusive and life-giving religious discourses or new campaigns exist, or where national or religious leadership articulate new inclusive and liberatory gender norms, these can take time to filter to local level congregations and their leaders (if at all they do).
- There is a need to strengthen efforts to mainstream alternative norms within the faith sector itself and to mainstream the faith sector contribution into the national GBV mitigation processes.

These problem areas were discussed and expanded on in several collaborative sessions and workshops. By means of this GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy, leaders, scholars and activists from diverse faith backgrounds and other interested partners are seeking to address these problem areas through practical and ethical measures that can achieve the four desired outcomes reflected in above Theory of Change.

Looking Back, Looking Forward: The SSPAR Framework

Considering each of the four key problem areas within a framework of ‘Strengths’, ‘Shortcomings’, ‘Priorities’, ‘Areas for growth and opportunity’ and ‘Risk’, has offered a way to devise this Strategy so that it continues (to accelerate and amplify), adjusts or (newly) activates work already being done in the faith sector. (This ‘strengths’, ‘shortcomings’, ‘priorities’, ‘areas for growth and opportunity’ and ‘risk’ framework will be termed the SSPAR framework for ease of reference – the concept is an adaptation of the familiar SWOT analysis.) The SSPAR framework has in one way or the other been deliberated since the beginning of the WWSOSA and Faith Action initiatives and is applied in the Joint Interfaith Statement of Commitment (2023).

LOOKING BACK: REVIEW

Below a summary of the SSPAR which looks at both the internal (elements pertaining to Faith Action) and external (elements pertaining to the broader faith sector landscape) implications:

STRENGTHS

Elements pertaining to Faith Action

- Interfaith commitment to GBV Prevention and Mitigation through a joint interfaith statement-
- Efficient and functioning Secretariat – WWSOSA
 - Collective knowledge
 - Access to knowledge resources
- Existing communities of sharing, networking, learning and practice
- Provides a safe and courageous space for people to find and share their voice
 - Offers a sense of community and solidarity

Elements pertaining to the broader sector

- Shared core values across all the partner faiths
- Positive resources contained in sacred texts to address GBV
- The sector has historic examples of positive social justice and healing
 - The sector is able to provide spiritual healing

SHORTCOMINGS

Elements pertaining to Faith Action

- Insufficient funding resources
- Structure & systemisation not yet robust in nature
 - Insufficient inclusion of vulnerable groups
 - Inconsistent communication
 - Participation fatigue
 - GBV low on faith leaders' agenda
- Inadequate integration with NSP on GBVF and related processes and forums
 - Need for greater faith diversity

Elements pertaining to the broader sector

- Complicity in GBV through silence and/or inaction
- Fear of stigma/reprisal/intimidation/exclusion for discussing or reporting GBV and related issues in religious environments or contexts
 - Gender biased religious norms can make the spaces unsafe
 - Contestation between collaboration and independence
- Misuse of religious traditions, teachings and practices that propagate exclusion, gender injustice and GBV
- Insufficient mechanisms to ensure safe spaces (inclusivity, physical safety, language and such) and sanction faith leaders/officers and institutions committing or perpetuating GBV

PRIORITIES

Elements pertaining to Faith Action

- Resource mobilisation
- Implement the (internal and external) Faith Action Communication Strategy and Protocol
 - Address priority attention areas facing the broader sector (as below)

Elements pertaining to broader sector

- Advocate for spiritual abuse to be recognised as a form of GBV in South Africa
- Increase visibility of Faith Action and WWSOSA within the faith sector and GBV prevention and mitigation partners and platforms
 - Advocate for GBV to be prioritised as a matter of urgency at leadership level
- Work to change the nuances in the different faiths and related traditions, teachings and practices that could or do perpetuate GBV
- Plan for mitigating external shocks such as national disasters/epidemics/social unrest

GROWTH & OPPORTUNITIES

Elements pertaining to Faith Action

- Tap-into faith communities' social and resource capital
 - Access to leaders and forums
- Integration with existing systems, processes, civil society initiatives
- Engage religious leaders and congregations as GBV mitigation champions in countrywide efforts
- Faith sector and FBO links to local processes/organisations/communities
- Review intervention areas to close gaps (e.g. working with men and boys)

Elements pertaining to the broader sector

- Increasing openness from different sectors and partners that the faith sector is pivotal in GBV prevention and mitigation
- Increasing acknowledgement within the faith sector itself that it has to recognise and mitigate GBV (within the sector and externally)

LOOKING FORWARD: RISK MANAGEMENT

Given that Faith Action is breaking new ground in South Africa with regards to the Faith Sector and GBV, many of initiatives are new and require testing, review and adjustment - during implementation. This kind of work involves risks of potential failure and restart. Faith Action sees this kind of risk as the opportunity for innovation to make things work. There is an openness amongst partners for learning and a recognition that gender transformation is a journey and that no single partner has all the answers. As such, projects and collaborations are documented to capture lessons learnt and thereby move towards good practice. While this is an evidence-informed approach, Faith Action acknowledges that not all working interventions and thinking, especially amongst community initiatives, are necessarily formally evidenced but can be remarkably rich in impact and efficacy. This said, the intention is that partners collaborating within and with Faith Action do so understanding the risks involved, and are prepared to work their way through to finding common ground and building on everyone's learnings.

LIKELIHOOD		IMPACT	
1. Remote – chances of event happening are almost zero.		1. Minor – low impact on organization; manageable.	
2. Possible – event could occur sometime.		2. Major – significant impact on operations.	
3. Likely – event expected or happens frequently.		3. Critical – severe impact on ability to continue operations.	

RISK	LIKELIHOOD	POTENTIAL IMPACT	MITIGATING ACTIONS
Lack of or insufficient ownership and involvement by partners due to lack of a sense of the value of being part of a collective or movement	Possible	Major	Regular monthly Forum meetings where the Coordination and collaborative projects report back and draw further participation; Monthly Partner profiles affirm good work and encourage further collaboration; Community of Praxis and access to F2F or online short skills modules
Misunderstandings related to diverse belief systems or religious or cultural practices	Likely	Major	The Joint Interfaith GBV statement identifies at least 8 common foundational values shared by all participating faiths, All encounters include a setting of a safe container and respectful and brave space for mutual learning. Frequent reassurance no proselytising allowed while affirming all life-giving faith tenets.
Push-back from some senior faith leaders	Likely	Minor for the movement	Intentionally build relationships gradually. Involve faith leaders in referring reps to activities, offer Resource Team support for their initiatives. Encourage leaders to register on the Online Platform and Community of Praxis. Help them to understand the benefits for their ministry and their institution to address GBV effectively. However, Faith Action does not expect it to have a major impact on the faith sector GBV movement-building as a whole, as long as mid-level leadership, scholars and activists continue to build stronger collaborative networks.
		Major for institutional mainstreaming of GBV, and it may slow progress	
Political instability	Possible	Minor but May become major if dynamics change	Faith Action continuously monitors political dynamics, particularly in unstable provinces. This may affect the NSP into the future, but notably, the outcome of the recent elections and the GNU have not yet affected the faith and GBV work.
Internal risks	Likely	Critical	Mostly related to financial uncertainty. Faith Action has an extremely lean Coordination Hub

			<p>or Secretariat and relies a lot on volunteer or contracted services. This spirit of voluntarism can be a strength, but it is not sustainable, as it affects wellness and health and risks burnout. The WWSOSA Board is currently engaged in a process to improve financial sustainability, particularly given its Secretariat role to the Faith Action Collective, as the key vehicle for Strategy 2030 implementation.</p>
--	--	--	--

Pathways and connectors

During the above-mentioned collaborations and workshops, key areas were identified to address the challenges (in the problem review) and achieve outcomes (as per the Theory of Change) using the SSPA framework. They included:

1. **Shifting the narrative:** Transforming harmful social/religious/cultural norms
2. **Movement-building and Advocacy:** Inclusion, networking and partnership building
3. **Localising Efforts and Impact:** Collaborating closely with local partners and building **safe** faith communities
4. **Sustainability:** Resources and momentum
5. **Coordination and communication**

Once these areas were analysed further, three of them presented as Strategic Pathways to effectively navigate the challenges and pave the way to achieve outcomes:

Pathway 1: Transforming Harmful Norms (Social, Cultural, Religious)

Pathway 2: Movement-Building, inclusion, networking, partnership

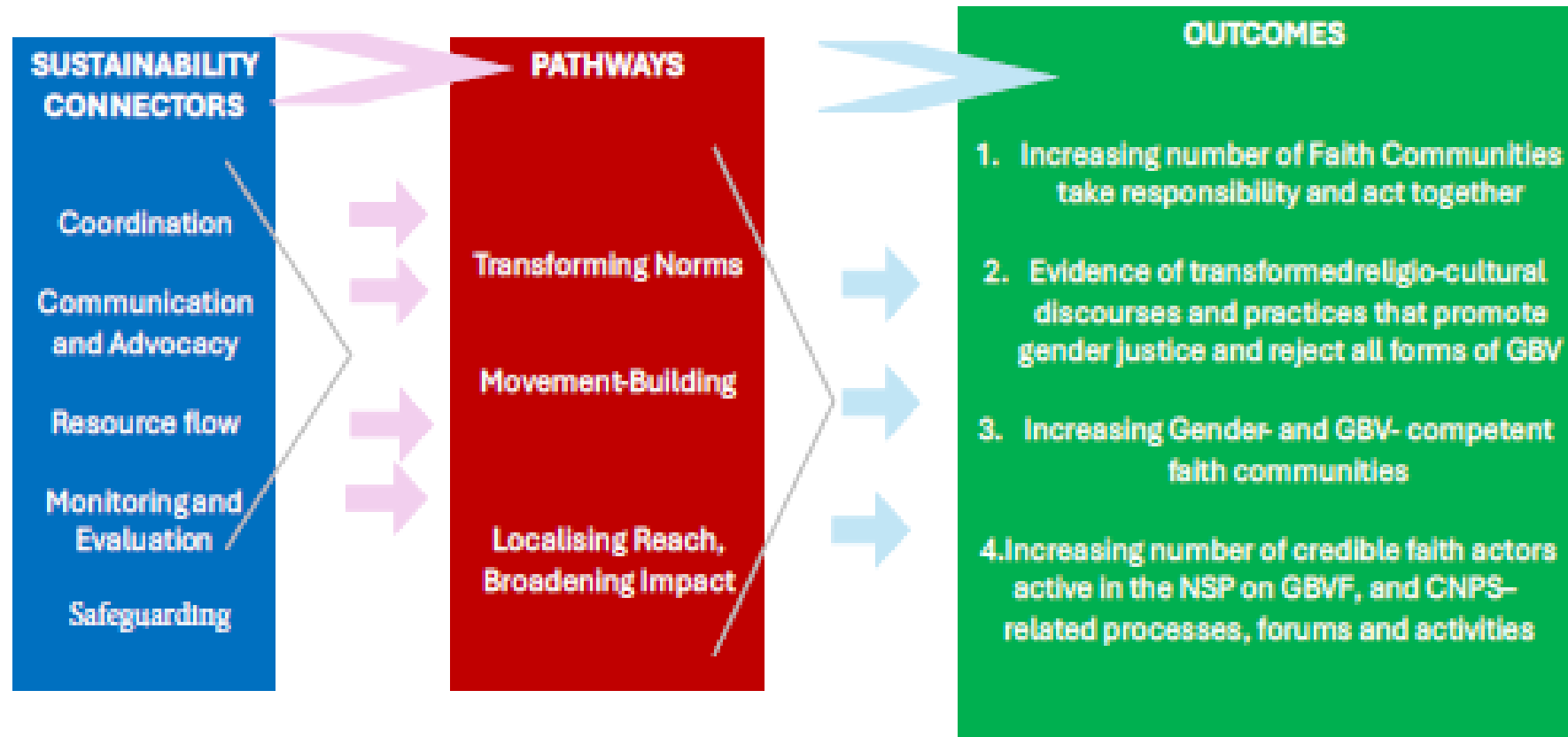
Pathway 3: Localising Efforts and Impact – collaboration structures at local level, linking local to national, building safe faith communities

The core elements listed under Thematic areas 4 and 5 above (**Advocacy, Coordination and Communication, and Sustainability** (both financial and human – through ensuring Resource Mobilisation), along with robust monitoring and evaluation (**M&E**) emerged as key connectors to ensure the sustained success of the pathways, and are thus referred to as the Strategy’s ‘Sustainability Connectors’. These sustainability connectors will facilitate effective coordination and capacitation for implementation of the Strategy. They will act as the ‘glue’ that unites interfaith efforts internally, and with other (non-faith-based sector) initiatives and processes both nationally and locally. The M&E framework will include qualitative and quantitative indicators and will be process-oriented to ensure consistency and quality.

An illustration of the resulting Interfaith GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy is as follows:

Interfaith GBV Mitigation Strategy: 2024 – 2030

Our collective faith will guide us towards a GBV-free South Africa



Amplify the sustainability connectors to accelerate and strengthen pathways to achieve Interfaith outcomes contributing to the goals of the NSP on GBVF, and the CNPS

Policy and Strategy Environment

The NSP on GBVF provides a cohesive strategic framework to guide the national response to GBVF and centres around six key pillars: 1) Accountability, Coordination and Leadership; 2) Prevention and Rebuilding Social Cohesion; 3) Protection, Safety and Justice; 4) Response, Care, Support and Healing; 5) Economic Power; and 6) Research and Information Management.

The CNPS responds to Pillar 2 which focuses on ‘...eliminating the social acceptance of all forms of violence against women, children and LGBTQIA+ persons through the development and implementation of long-term, comprehensive, adaptable, context specific and holistic approaches to prevention.’ It seeks to transform harmful social and structural norms that feed GBV while intentionally reshaping the values and norms in ways that build positive social cohesion and restores human dignity. Two other key strategies for the faith sector to align with and draw guidance from are the National Integrated Femicide Prevention Strategy, and the Integrated Crime and Prevention Strategy.

This Interfaith GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy bases its policy and legislative framework as incorporated in the NSP on GBVF and the CNPS which highlight the following national, regional and international commitments:

The Constitution of South Africa: The NSP on GBVF notes that the rights comprised in the Constitution ‘underscore a national commitment to building a society that is free from all forms of violence and that respects, protects and fulfils the human rights principles of bodily integrity and autonomy.’

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) recognises that GBV must be considered beyond the act of violence itself to include education, prevention, and victim assistance.⁵⁵ As a member of the SADC, South Africa has related commitments including, but not limited to, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the SADC Regional GBV Strategy and Framework for Action 2019 - 2030 and the SADC Parliamentary Forum (PF) Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023. The SADC Model Law on GBV aims to achieve gender equality in the region. The SADC PF makes it clear that traditional and religious practices do not justify gender inequality and GBV in any way. The model law justifies this stance by emphasising that it does not seek to undermine cultural or religious customs but rather, it is steeped in a human rights framework, upholding a person’s right to physical integrity, health, life and protection from torture and inhuman and degrading treatment.⁵⁶ Two key uptakes for South Africa are that traditional and religious leaders in the region have been involved in the construction of the model law; and it (the Model Law) acknowledges that men can also be victims of GBV.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Southern African Development Community (SADC). *Gender Based Violence*. (And links to other related articles found here:) <https://www.sadc.int/issues/gender/gender-based-violence/> (Last accessed: 29 March 2022)

⁵⁶ Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) Strategic Plan 2019– 2023.(section 2.1) <https://www.sadcpf.org/index.php/en/component/edocman/sadc-pf-strategic-plan-2019-2023/viewdocument/151?Itemid=> (Last accessed: 29 March 2022)

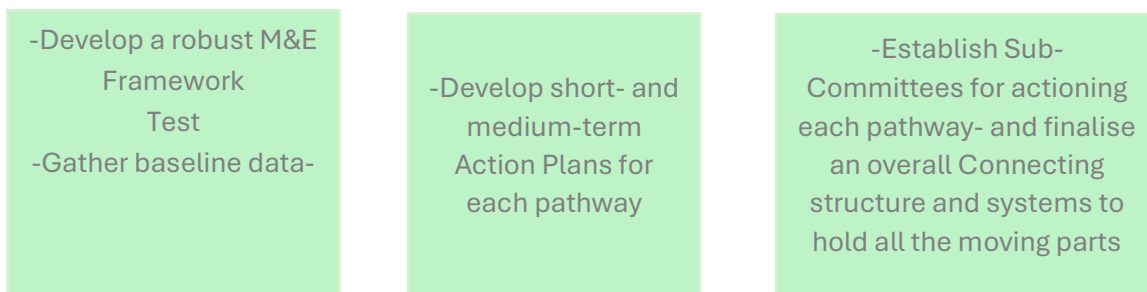
⁵⁷ Mokoena, S. Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. (Posted on 27 September 2021). *SADC-PF Consults Religious and Traditional Leaders on GBV Model Law*. <https://www.parliament.gov.za/news/sadc-pf-consults-religious-and-traditional-leaders-gbv-model-law> (Last accessed: 29 March 2022)

International commitments: South Africa has signed and ratified various international conventions including, but not limited to, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Beijing Platform for Action; the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol); ILO’s Violence and Harassment Convention 2019 (No. 190); and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These protocols are strong advocacy tools that the faith sector uses to mobilise leaders and leadership processes to mitigate GBV, and to strengthen accountability and responsibility amongst faith-based leadership.

Next Steps

This high-level Strategy has spearheaded three (3) interrelated activities (or next steps) that have already begun and that will ground the Strategy as an implementable and concrete initiative. The actionable areas will pull together joint initiatives and independent actions in the Faith sector. They [the activities] will collectively boost shared accountability and responsibility to one another (as individuals, organisations and a Collective) and to the Almighty, compassionate One for whom every person is of equal value. The next steps include:



This strategy invites all faith sector actors to be inspired to locate their own contributions, alone and with others, to achieve the shared faith sector vision of an inclusive society free from GBV and Femicide.

CONCLUSION

The Interfaith Sector GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy (2024-2030) provides a robust framework for mobilizing faith communities in South Africa to effectively address GBV within the faith sector itself and contribute meaningfully to GBV prevention and mitigation efforts across the country. The strengths of the Interfaith Strategy lie in its: holistic engagement with religious leaders and faith communities; its emphasis on survivors; and its commitment to seek out and establish shared accountability and shared responsibility for GBV across all faiths. However, the strategy faces challenges, including resistance from conservative religious sectors, resource constraints, and unclear accountability mechanisms. To succeed, it will need to navigate these obstacles carefully, ensuring that it remains inclusive, well-resourced, and aligned with the diverse realities of South African faith communities.