



Learning Brief: The Role of Religious Leaders in SASA! Faith – Insights from Insiza





INTRODUCTION

Religious leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the beliefs, values, and practices of their communities. Their influence extends beyond the pulpit into homes and social spaces, making them key allies in the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV). GBV remains a pressing concern in Insiza District, a prominent mining and farming area, where economic pressures, high unemployment, seasonal labor migration, and alcohol abuse contribute to increased risks of violence against women and girls. Women in these communities often experience compounded harm, with limited access to support services, highlighting the need for culturally grounded interventions led by trusted leaders.

The SASA! Faith approach builds on this potential by engaging faith leaders and communities to reflect on issues of power, faith, and relationships.

By integrating biblical teachings with discussions on justice, dignity, and equality, it seeks to inspire individuals and congregations to challenge harmful norms, prevent violence, and promote shared responsibility. In Insiza, Emthonjeni Women's Forum (EWF), with support from Trocaire and Irish Aid, is implementing SASA! Faith in wards 1, 2, 15, and 19 across 16 faith spaces, including Apostolic Faith Mission, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Twelve Apostle Church of Christ, His Presence Ministries, True Gospel Church, and Zion Christian Church. The methodology has proven to be a powerful catalyst for shifting mindsets and fostering positive change in faith communities, as congregants increasingly recognize harmful gender norms and adopt practices that promote equality and shared responsibility.



1. Strengthened Role of Religious Leaders

In Insiza, pastors, elders, and other faith leaders have embraced SASA! Faith by opening their churches to Community Activists (CAs) and actively participating in sessions. Their sermons and teachings have amplified SASA! Faith messages, ensuring that discussions on power, equality, and GBV resonate deeply with congregations. Through SASA! Faith, religious leaders have become vocal champions against GBV. They are now addressing violence in sermons, Bible studies, and counseling sessions. Their leadership is breaking long-held silences and opening new avenues for dialogue on violence in faith spaces.

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“SASA! Faith opened my eyes. I used to think violence in families was a private issue, but now I see it as a community issue that we must all address,” shared a pastor in Ward 2, 2025.

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2. Integration of Faith and Positive Norms

SASA! Faith has empowered leaders to use scripture to promote peace, dignity, and justice. By grounding conversations in faith, GBV is no longer dismissed as a foreign idea or uncomfortable debate but embraced as part of living true Christian values. This shift has reduced resistance among congregants, making it easier for men and women to openly talk about equality, respect, and healthy relationships. For example, in the Zion Christian Church in Ward 19, faith leaders facilitated sermons where congregants reflected on biblical teachings about justice and dignity, leading to men actively supporting their wives with household chores and decision-making.

As a result, families are beginning to experience more harmony, and communities now recognize that ending violence is not only a social duty but also a spiritual calling. A leader from ward 15 remarked:

“ *SASA! Faith opened my eyes to see that preventing violence is part of my ministry. I now use the sermon notes in my preaching, and they help me show that peace, dignity, and respect are rooted in the Word of God,*” church leader in Ward 15, 2025. ”



3. Increased Community Awareness and Action

Faith leaders' influence has sparked wider conversations in homes and communities, breaking the silence that once surrounded GBV. Congregants are now more aware of the different forms of violence and the referral pathways available for survivors. Importantly, this awareness has translated into action: to date, religious leaders in the SASA! Faith spaces have referred 23 survivors to Musasa and the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) for shelter, logistical support, and legal advice. These referrals are not just numbers, they represent lives protected, survivors receiving safety, justice, and healing, and a growing trust in faith leaders as reliable allies in times of crisis. This marks a significant shift from passive preaching to active protection, demonstrating the critical value of faith leadership in ensuring no survivor is left without support.

"Our pastors are not just preaching anymore, they are helping us find safety and justice. Survivors now know they are not alone," said a congregant from Ward 1, 2025.

4. Shifts in Attitudes and Behaviors

Through SASA! Faith, significant changes are emerging in both households and communities. Faith leaders, particularly pastors and elders in the ZCC church, have modeled sharing responsibilities and promoting respect between men and women. Their sermons, teachings, and personal examples helped men realize the value of supporting their wives and reducing women's burdens, enabling women to enjoy greater freedom and participate fully in family and community life. As a result, women are gaining confidence to speak out, make decisions, and take on leadership roles. By actively demonstrating equality and respect, religious leaders are inspiring their congregants to embrace healthier, more equitable relationships, creating lasting change within their faith communities.

"I started helping my wife with chores after learning about power and equality in SASA! Faith sermons. It brought peace to my home," testified a male participant in Ward 19, 2025.



5. Sustained Local Ownership

Rooted in scripture and led by trusted faith leaders, SASA! Faith has gained strong acceptance in Insiza. Religious leaders are championing its principles, challenging harmful norms, and modeling equitable behaviors. Their commitment ensures that communities continue to shift attitudes and practices toward gender equality, creating lasting, sustainable change beyond the project's lifespan.

"Even if the project ends, we will continue teaching these lessons because they are part of our faith," affirmed a pastor from Ward 15, 2025.



Key Highlights

- ▶ Faith leaders are actively breaking the silence on GBV, sparking open dialogue within their congregations. For example, leaders at the Zion Christian Church in Ward 19 held a discussion with youth groups on domestic violence, encouraging them to speak out and support survivors.
- ▶ Biblical teachings are being used to promote justice, dignity, and equality, guiding congregations toward positive change. A leader from the Apostolic Faith Mission shared, “These sessions helped me show my congregation that treating women with respect is a biblical mandate.”
- ▶ Communities demonstrate increased awareness of GBV and referral pathways for survivors. In the Seventh Day Adventist church in Ward 19, congregants now know where to report cases and how to access psychosocial support.
- ▶ Families are showing positive shifts in dynamics, with men and women sharing responsibilities more equitably. At the Roman Catholic church in Ward 2, men are increasingly assisting with household chores, reducing the burden on women.
- ▶ Religious leaders are committed to sustaining SASA! Faith, ensuring lasting change beyond the project’s lifespan. Leaders across His Presence Ministries and True Gospel Church have pledged to continue facilitating sessions and mentoring others in their congregations.