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Faith for Positive Change for Children

A Faith-Based Participatory Guide for Ending
Harmful Practices

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The guide brings together original research and field insights with foundational resources produced by RfP, UNICEF, JLI, and the ACRL-RfP. It draws extensively from:

- RfP and ACRL-RfP's *Seeds of Change: Honouring Life, Preserving Dignity interfaith* manual
- The FPCC MEAL Plan and Mind-Heart Dialogue Facilitator's Guide
- UNICEF's *Global Programme Guidance on Faith Engagement*

- JLI's *Why Faith?* Report and FPCC partnership principles

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This guide reflects a shared commitment to protect children through faith-led, community-owned, and contextually rooted action.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Child marriage	Any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.
Co-design	A participatory process in which community members and faith actors jointly design policies, programmes, interventions, tools, or messages in a way that reflects shared values and priorities.
Faith actors	The term ‘faith actors’ covers a wide variety of actors whose definitions and typology vary in literature and contexts. In this guide, the term refers to faith-based organizations, religious bodies or networks, faith communities, and religious leaders.
Faith for Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities (FPCC)	FPCC, launched in 2018, is an initiative based on faith engagement to broaden the scope and influence of faith in development and humanitarian work. It is based on three components: Faith-centred research and mapping, promotion of community feedback, and establishment of long-term faith coordination and partnerships. ¹
Faith-based engagement	A way to work with faith-based communities and religious leaders to promote positive behaviour and social change.
Faith community	People who share common religious beliefs and values and draw upon these to carry out activities in their respective communities.
Female genital mutilation (FGM)	All procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM has serious short-term and long-term complications such as haemorrhage, infection, complications during birth and psychological consequences. ²
Faith leaders	Believers who play influential roles within their faith and broader local communities. They benefit from the trust of their local faith community, exercise moral authority and shape public opinion.
Faith-led accountability	A form of mutual and spiritual responsibility where faith leaders, communities, and institutions track commitments based on shared moral and theological values.
Harmful practices	Harmful practices are persistent practices and behaviours that are grounded on discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and other grounds, as well as multiple and/or intersecting forms of discrimination that often involve violence and cause physical and/or psychological harm or suffering. ³ For the purposes of this guide, ‘harmful practices’ refer to child marriage and FGM.
Institutionalization	The process of embedding values, tools, and practices into religious structures, routines, and leadership to ensure sustainability beyond a project cycle.
Journey of Change	A phased model used in this guide to represent the non-linear, long-term process of shifting individual beliefs, community norms, and institutional policies.
Medicalization of FGM	‘Medicalization’ of FGM refers to situations in which FGM is practised by any category of health care provider, whether in a public or a private clinic, at home or elsewhere. It also includes the procedure of re-infibulation at any point in a woman’s life. ⁴
Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees (MFACCs)	MAFCCs are local or national interfaith structures that coordinate joint action by faith actors to end harmful practices and promote child protection.
Mind–Heart dialogue	‘A reflective and experiential learning process, exploring faith convictions, lived experiences and knowledge to influence positive social and behavioural change. It supports faith groups and development partners to work together to protect and empower children, families and communities.’ ⁵
Social and behaviour change (SBC)	Social and behaviour change aims to lower the cognitive, social and structural barriers that hinder people from adopting positive practices and that hinder societies from becoming more equitable, cohesive and peaceful. ⁶

List of Acronyms

ARP	Alternative rites of passage
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme
CLHY	Chaguo Langu Haki Yangu (Meaning My Choice, My Right)
CO	Country Office
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil society organization
FBOs	Faith-based organizations
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FPCC	Faith for Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities
GAMCOTRAP	Gambia Committee on Traditional practices affecting women and children
HCD	Human-centred design
HQ	Headquarters
IRCE	Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia
JoC	Journey of Change
JLI	Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
MFACC	Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees
MHD	Mind-Heart Dialogue
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (Holy Bible)
SH	Samuel Hall
SBC	Social and behaviour change
RAR	Reflect-Act-Reflect
RfP	Religions for Peace
ToC	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNJP-FGM	UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation
WHO	World Health Organization
WWSO	We Will Speak Out Coalition

Introduction

Faith for Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities (FPCC)⁷ is a global partnership between UNICEF, Religions for Peace – the world’s largest multi-faith convenor – the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLI), knowledge partner and umbrella organization of international and local faith-based organizations (FBOs) and other partners. FPCC was conceived in 2018 by UNICEF’s Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) section to help UNICEF move beyond single-sector, small-scale, ad hoc and sometimes instrumentalist approaches to faith engagement. This partnership model is now mirrored at the regional level in ESAR (East and Southern Africa Region), WCAR (West and Central Africa Region), SAR (South Asia Region) and LACR (Latin America and the Caribbean Region) and is gradually being rolled out across multiple countries in each of these regions. The FPCC initiative relies on two key elements as the cornerstones for implementation and change: the Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees (MFACCs) as the operational foundation, and the Mind–Heart Dialogue (MHD) as the methodological approach for sharing, learning, and facilitating positive social and behaviour change.

This approach is critical in addressing harmful practices like female genital mutilation and child marriage. These practices persist not only due to social norms and cultural expectations but also because they are often perceived as religiously or morally justified. While rooted in community identity and social expectations, these practices violate children’s rights and cause lifelong harm. Religious leaders, as trusted moral authorities, are uniquely positioned to challenge these justifications and lead the way towards faith-aligned protection and dignity for all children.

Faith Traditions as a Moral Foundation for Ending Harmful Practices

Across diverse religious traditions, faith has long been a source of moral guidance on human dignity, justice, and the protection of the vulnerable. This guide has been co-created with and is widely accepted by religious scholars engaged during the development phase. It is grounded in the recognition that **harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage are not prescribed by religious texts, but are rooted in social and cultural expectations**. These can be challenged through theological reflection and faith-led action.

Shared across many religious traditions are fundamental values that affirm human worth, the sanctity of the body, and the principle of compassionate care:

- **Human beings possess innate dignity and value:**
 - *“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them...”* (Genesis 1:27, NRSV).
 - *“We have certainly created man in the best of stature.”* (Qur’an 95:4, Sahih International).
- **The body is entrusted and must not be harmed:**
 - *“Do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction...”* (Qur’an 2:195, Sahih International).
 - *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you...?”* (1 Corinthians 6:19, NRSV).
- **Marriage requires maturity and consent:**
 - *“Test the orphans until they reach marriageable age; then if you perceive in them sound judgment, release their property to them...”* (Qur’an 4:6, Sahih International).
 - *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...”* (Ephesians 5:25, NRSV).
- **Justice and compassion are spiritual imperatives:**
 - *“He has told you, O mortal, what is good... to do justice, and to love kindness...”* (Micah 6:8, NRSV).
 - *“Indeed, Allah commands justice and good conduct and giving to relatives...”* (Qur’an 16:90, Sahih International).

These sacred teachings affirm that **ending harmful practices is not a departure from faith, but a fulfilment of it**. Faith leaders and communities are therefore called to protect, not harm, and to draw on their traditions as a source of liberation and well-being.

This Programme Guide for faith engagement to end harmful practices serves as a vital resource for faith actors, development practitioners, government agencies, and other stakeholders engaged in efforts to eliminate harmful practices. It offers practical guidance and insights to support more effective, coordinated, and context-sensitive interventions.

Who Is This Guide For?

Actor	How They Can Use the Guide
UNICEF Staff and staff from other UN agencies (e.g., UNFPA, WHO)	Integrate faith engagement into SBC, child protection, gender and advocacy strategies
Other development & UN Humanitarian Partners	Coordinate faith-inclusive approaches across sectors
CSOs/ NGOs/ INGOs	Integrate faith-based approaches into their programmes and improve engagement with local faith leaders
Faith leaders and religious institutions	Lead dialogues, shape narratives, and influence community change from within
Faith-based organizations (FBOs)	Embed protection principles and gender equality in programmatic work
Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees (MFACCs) or Interfaith Councils	Harmonize interfaith advocacy and localize global frameworks at the national level
Government officials	Ministries of Religious Affairs and Child and Social Welfare, councils for the elimination of harmful practices

Tailoring This Guide: The guide is not a 'one-size-fits-all' document. It requires adaptation to local religious and cultural contexts and aims to promote ownership among the communities themselves.

Conceptual Framework & Guiding Principles

This programme is grounded in the understanding that harmful practices like FGM and child marriage are not only legal or health issues – they are also deeply social, moral, and spiritual in nature. Faith communities often play a dual role: they can sustain harmful norms, but they also hold transformative potential to end them.

This chapter outlines the conceptual foundation of our approach. It brings together the guiding principles that shape how we work, a theory of change rooted in faith engagement and norm transformation, and a structured results framework that connects community-level action to broader systems change.

These elements are designed to ensure that all programme activities from storytelling circles to policy advocacy are coherent, locally grounded, and anchored in both evidence and scripture.

The Mind–Heart–Faith Dialogue

This guide is adapted from the existing [Mind and Heart Dialogue Facilitators guide](#) and recognizes the complexity of social and religious change. It is informed by three intersecting domains of influence:

Component	What It Represents	Why It Matters
Mind	Evidence, facts, laws, health and human rights frameworks	Supports informed decision-making based on scientific arguments and legal literacy
Heart	Emotion, empathy, lived experience, and community memories	Builds personal connection and collective change, and can motivate action
Faith	Scripture, doctrine, rituals, values, and moral responsibility	Provides theological legitimacy and moral grounding



Faith-led transformation becomes possible when these three domains operate in tandem, with faith not seen as separate from facts or feelings, but as a force that strengthens and humanizes both. All tools in this guide speak to these dimensions collectively, bridging belief and behaviour, tradition and transformation.

The Imam's Dilemma

When I first heard about FGM being harmful, I resisted. My community expects me to uphold the practice, and some even say it is 'sunnah.' But then I read deeper. I asked scholars. I realized it was never prescribed in the Qur'an. Now, I preach protection, not pain.

— Imam, Senegal, RfP Reflection Series

This shift illustrates the power of the Heart (listening to community pain), the Mind (learning from evidence and scholarship), and the Faith (returning to the Holy Qur'an for moral clarity). The Imam's transformation did not reject religion; it rediscovered it as a source of healing and justice.

The Journey of Faith-Led Change

The **shift from harmful practices to protection-aligned behaviours is not linear or externally driven**. It is a community-led journey of reflection, realignment, and responsibility anchored in faith, values, and relationships.

Within the FPCC approach, this journey unfolds through four core stages:

1. Awareness and understanding: The journey begins with openness, as individuals and communities become willing to hear, think about, and process an issue that may never have been questioned before. This stage is not just about acquiring knowledge, but about making cognitive and emotional space to engage with sensitive, often deeply rooted, norms. For many, this may be the first time FGM or child marriage is perceived as something that could be debated, re-examined, or changed. Factors such as who delivers the message (the messenger effect) and people's mental and emotional bandwidth significantly influence readiness to listen. As trust is built and space for reflection expands, individuals and communities become increas-

ingly aware of and begin to understand the harms associated with FGM and child marriage – emotionally, theologically, and socially.

2. Reflection: Building on early awareness, this stage invites faith leaders, congregants, families, and peer networks to explore how their current beliefs, behaviours, and social expectations align or conflict with their core religious values. This includes deeply personal and collective questioning: Are we protecting or harming in the name of tradition? Does our faith truly demand this? Reflection is nurtured through safe and trusted spaces, such as study circles, storytelling sessions, or small-group scripture dialogues. It is often during this phase that emotional and theological dissonance surfaces, requiring support from peers, religious scholars, and facilitators. For some, this stage can be unsettling, but it is also where new moral clarity and shared convictions begin to take root.

3. Action: When internal reflection aligns with spiritual conviction and community readiness, faith actors begin to take visible steps towards change. Faith actors commit to taking action such as speaking out, advocating for policies and laws, shifting messaging, acting as role models, supporting survivors, stopping instances of FGM or child marriage, refusing to officiate child marriages and leading local alternatives to harmful rites and practices. Action is relational and layered, and it can be quiet or public, individual or collective. Importantly, this stage reinforces the moral courage of faith actors who often take personal and reputational risks to stand for protection and dignity. Building networks and collectives (e.g. MFACCs, women's unions, youth faith groups) helps reinforce these actions and provide solidarity when facing pushback.

4. Institutionalization: Sustainable change is achieved when new norms and protective practices are no longer dependent on individual champions but are embedded in religious education (e.g. parenting courses), community structures, peer support systems, religious institutions and interfaith coordination platforms. This includes integrating protective messaging into religious education, parenting courses, premarital counselling, and community rituals. Peer accountability systems, pastoral care structures, women and youth leadership pathways, and interfaith coordination bodies all contribute to institutionalizing change. In this phase, spiritual values of protection, justice, and compassion are no longer optional, and they become standard, visible, and expected expressions of religious life.

THIS JOURNEY IS ONLY EFFECTIVE WHEN IT IS LOCALLY OWNED AND SUSTAINED.

Faith actors must not be seen as implementers of external programmes, but as co-designers of moral, spiritual, and social change. Their influence is strongest when rooted in theological legitimacy, pastoral trust, and institutional support.

Key enablers of transformation include:

1. Localization: Faith actors are not messengers of external agendas; they are trusted moral leaders embedded in their communities. All interventions must be co-created with local religious networks and reflect their languages, lived realities, and theological frameworks. This principle underpins transformative localization: international organizations must move beyond project-based partnerships towards long-term accompaniment, recognizing and resourcing faith networks as independent actors and strategic allies.

2. Community accountability: Real change must be accountable to those most affected, such as girls, survivors, youth, and congregants. This requires participatory monitoring and feedback loops, embedded in trusted spaces such as study circles, prayer groups, MFACCs, and community-led forums. Accountability must also extend into digital spaces. WhatsApp groups, online sermons, and locally run platforms can serve as powerful sites of dialogue, social listening, and norm tracking. These systems must be trusted, locally owned, and responsive in real time.

3. Theological integrity: Faith engagement must remain grounded in authentic scriptural values of protection, compassion, and justice and equip leaders to reinterpret harmful norms through their own theological lens. As pushback emerges, faith leaders need not only doctrinal knowledge but moral courage to navigate backlash. Structured, peer-supported spaces for reflection, such as scripture circles or interfaith retreats, are crucial for fostering confidence and conviction in the face of social and institutional pressures.

4. Networks and collectives for resilience and scale: Local and regional networks of faith actors, including interfaith councils, MFACCs, women's unions, youth groups, and interfaith platforms, must be supported as systems of solidarity. These collectives provide moral backing, mutual protection in the face of pushback, and peer learning that sustains change beyond individual leaders or project cycles as part of a localization agenda.

5. Anticipating and responding to pushback: Pushback to the elimination of FGM and child marriage is evolving, and it is now more vocal. Faith actors must be equipped to identify early warning signs, maintain open dialogue, and adapt their strategies with speed and integrity.

6. Dialogue-centred transformation: Change is sustained through dialogue. Every phase of programming must create space for honest reflection, disagreement, and moral questioning. While some religious spaces, such as sermons, digital campaigns, or formal prayer gatherings, are traditionally monologic in form, they often spark or are embedded within dialogic processes. For example, storytelling, study groups, and post-sermon reflections can become sites of meaningful exchange. Even sermons or prayer meetings, when grounded in lived experience and followed by community discussion, can open doors to moral questioning and collective growth. Dialogue is the process through which fear is named, resistance is softened, and new norms are built collectively, anchored in both faith and empathy.

What We Mean by Localization in Faith Engagement

Localization is not simply shifting responsibility to local actors. In the FPCC approach, it involves four interlinked dimensions:

1. Moral and scriptural ownership: Faith leaders are not implementers, they are co-authors of the solution, grounded in theology and lived experience.

2. Community-level: Local faith groups, MFACCs, and informal networks are resourced to lead reflection, decision-making, and action beyond the project cycle.

3. Responsive accountability: Monitoring and learning mechanisms [e.g., Reflect-Act-Reflect (RAR) cycles, faith-led scorecards, real-time pushback detection] are embedded in community and faith routines, not imposed from outside.

4. Long-term accompaniment: Partnerships with international actors move beyond short-term projects to sustained alliances that centre dignity, mutual trust, and interdependence.

These dimensions align with commitments in the 2016 Grand Bargain, the global agreement to reform the delivery of humanitarian aid, but they are also adapted to the realities of faith engagement. In this guide, localization means shifting not only *who delivers* interventions, but *who defines, owns and sustains* change.

OUR ASSUMPTION IS THAT:

1. **IF** faith leaders are capacitated through the Mind-Heart Dialogue approach, a process that equips them to analyse, mediate, and mitigate tensions between faith/cultural norms and scientific recommendations,
2. **And IF** inclusive and effective faith coordination mechanisms for advocacy and policy change are established,
3. **And IF** partnerships between international organizations and faith actors are structured around localization, co-ownership, and sustainability rather than short-term projects,
4. **THEN** faith leaders will be positioned to lead transformational change: challenging harmful social norms, responding constructively to resistance, and championing faith-aligned protection for children and communities,
5. **BECAUSE** faith leaders hold moral and social authority within their communities. Their ability to bridge the gap between faith-based beliefs and scientific recommendations, especially when they are owners of the process, accountable to their communities, and supported through sustained dialogue, will increase the acceptance of new, protective norms.

Explaining the Journey of Change and Programming Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the comprehensive ecosystem through which faith-led transformation unfolds, from individual mindset shifts to systemic change. Let's walk through it step-by-step:

1. Strategies for Change: What Faith Actors Do

Change begins with a set of interconnected strategies: Dialogue, Messaging, Accompaniment, Accountability, Coordination, Engagement (including online), and Advocacy.

2. Mechanisms and Platforms: Where Change Happens

Change must be implemented through trusted platforms. These platforms are chosen because they represent the principles of Faith Ownership and Local Leadership. Faith actors are not messengers of external agendas; they are co-authors of change, working through structures they know, lead, and trust.

3. Levels of Influence: How Change Cascades

Change moves from intra-faith to interfaith spaces; from individuals to peer groups, communities, institutions, and policy. This reflects the principle of Transformative and Non-Extractive Partnerships: actual change is not project-delivered but community-embedded and relationally sustained.

4. Outcomes of the Journey

Each stage of the journey contributes to these cumulative outcomes:

- **Capacity-building (Outcome 1):** This refers to the extent to which faith leaders and institutions have increased capacity and are applying new skills.
- **Faith-based engagement and coordination (Outcome 2):** This assesses the strength of multi-faith collaboration and collective action.
- **Behaviour change indicators (Outcome 3):** These focus on shifts in community knowledge, attitudes, and practices.
- **Policy advocacy indicators (Outcome 4):** These measure changes in the policy and institutional environment attributable to faith-based advocacy.

5. Cross-Cutting Realities

This journey is not linear, and it's shaped by real-world complexity. When developing action plans towards ending harmful practices, various cross-cutting issues should be considered and mainstreamed throughout, namely by: incorporating a gender lens, assessing and addressing the marginalization of minority groups, including religious minorities, ensuring children and youth participation, and linking humanitarian and development silos.

While these are the most critical cross-cutting issues across all contexts, other cross-cutting areas can be added or prioritized, as appropriate, such as environmental issues.

The Goals Hierarchy pictured in Figure 2 outlines how the programme's inputs, activities, and tools contribute to shared outcomes and long-term impact. It reflects a results-based structure aligned with UNICEF SBC and FPCC frameworks, showing how individual and collective action builds towards systems-level change. Each level of the framework: inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact, is rooted in a faith principle and supports localization, coordination, and sustained protection.

Figure 1: The Journey of Faith-Led Change

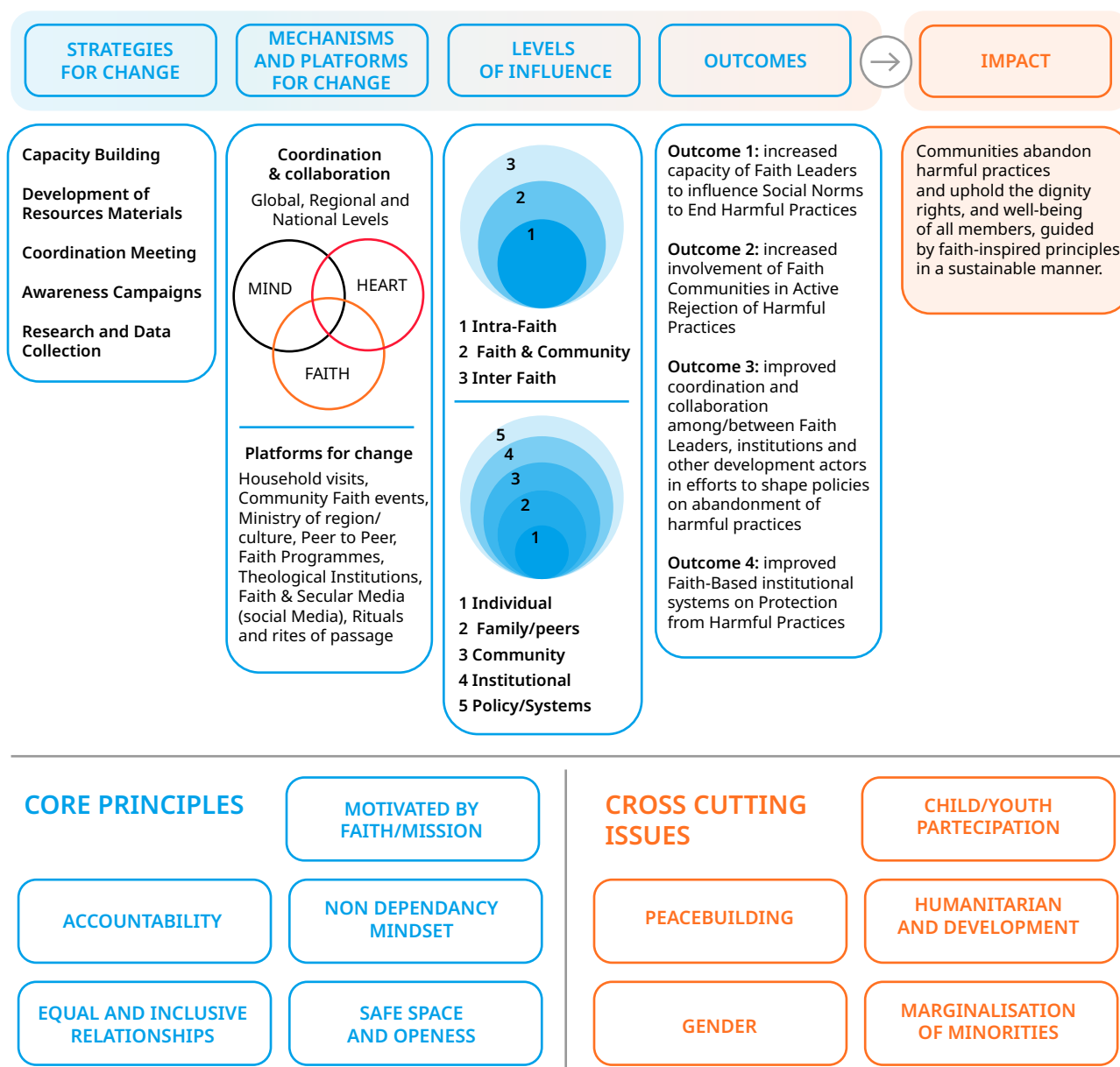
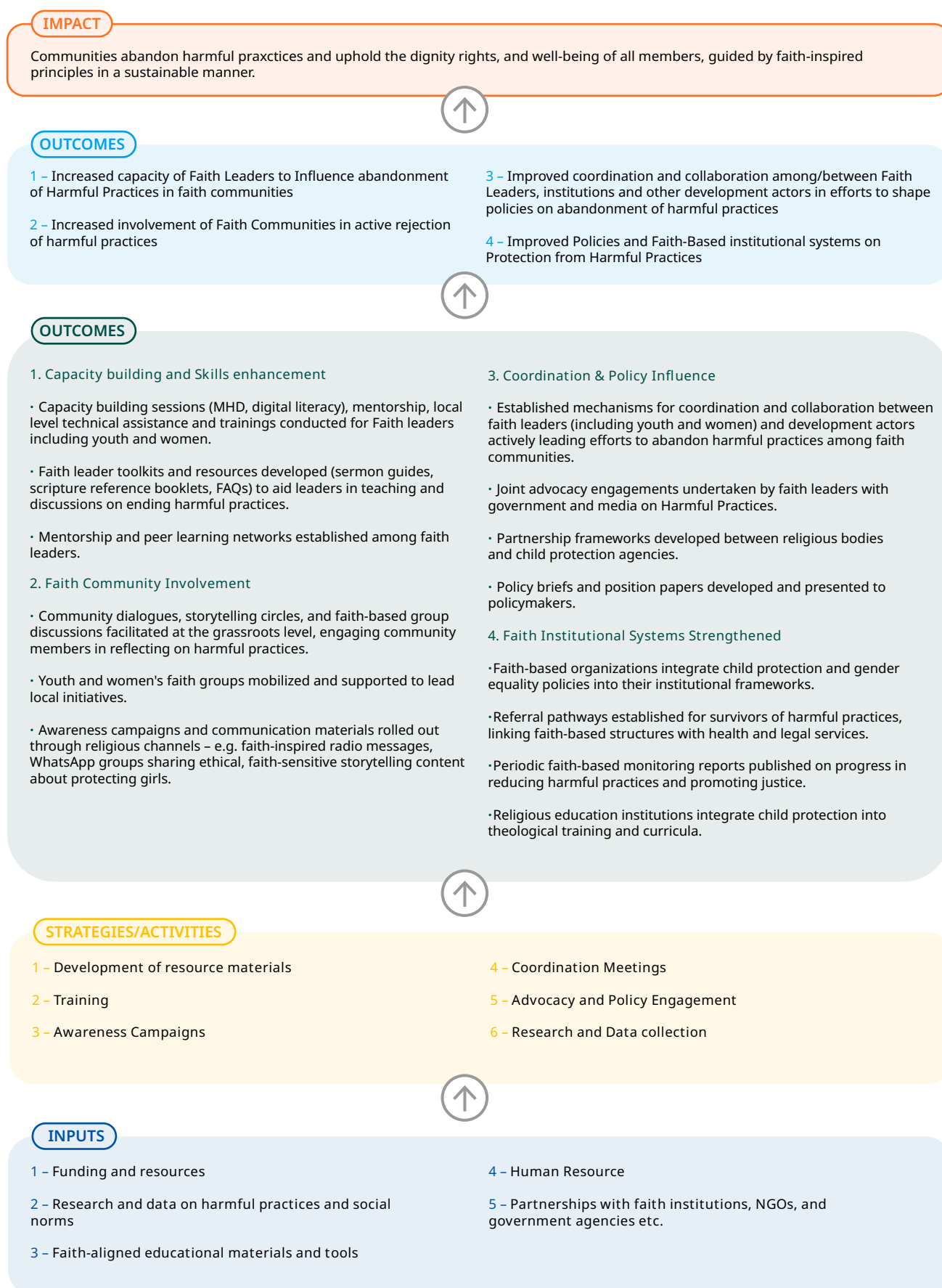


Figure 2: The Goals Hierarchy



Foundations and Sources of the Programme Guide

This programme guide is informed by seven core resources and adapted through applied research across 17 countries. It integrates theological framing, evidence-based guidance, and practical tools to support meaningful, faith-led efforts to end harmful practices affecting children and communities.

At its core is the *Seeds of Change: Honouring Life, Preserving Dignity* interfaith manual, developed by Religions for Peace (RfP), which offers scriptural arguments, dialogue methods, and activity modules tailored to faith actors. The guide also draws heavily from UNICEF's Faith for Positive Change for Children (FPCC) initiative, combining global SBC approaches with locally grounded faith engagement strategies.

This guide is further shaped by Samuel Hall's [desk review on effective faith engagement approaches to end harmful practices](#) and a scoping exercise across the 17 countries participating in the UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM. These countries are: Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, The Gambia, Uganda and Yemen.

These efforts identified patterns of theological resistance, shifting narratives (such as the medicalization or cross-border FGM), and opportunities for early detection and faith-rooted response. The findings informed both the structure of the guide and the design of tools accompanying this guide.

Key resources informing this guide

- [FPCC MEAL Plan](#): A participatory framework for monitoring faith engagement efforts, grounded in community feedback and adaptive learning. Informs the guide's accountability and relevance mechanisms.
- [UNICEF Global Programme Guidance on Faith Engagement](#): Outlines principles for respectful, inclusive, and value-based collaboration with faith actors. Shapes the programme's approach to trust-building and long-term partnerships.
- [FPCC Mind-Heart dialogue facilitators guide](#): Provides a methodology that integrates rational, emotional, and spiritual reflection. Influences the structure of dialogue tools and training components.
- [FPCC Principles of participatory partnership with faith actors and institutions for the well-being of children, their families and communities](#): Emphasizes equity, co-creation, and mutual accountability in working with faith actors. These principles are reflected in all tools and engagement strategies in the guide.
- JLI's "Why Faith? Engaging Faith Mechanisms to End Violence Against Children" (2019): Offers global evidence on why and how faith communities are critical to ending violence against children. Supports the rationale for investing in faith-rooted protection models.
- [UNICEF's Review of Effective Faith Engagement Strategies for Addressing Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation \(October 2025\)](#): Provides a deep dive into the current picture of the practice of FGM and child marriage in 15 African countries and Yemen.
- RfP's *Seeds of Change: Uniting Faith Communities to Protect Girls' Rights Everywhere*: Provides theological grounding, interfaith messaging, and practical tools for women, youth, and faith leaders. This content has been directly adapted into tools across the guide.

Key adaptations for accessibility and relevance

To support contextual adaptation and relevance, this guide is:

- **Practical and contextualized**: Tools and language are adapted to diverse religious traditions and grounded in real-life programme use.
- **Structured by phases**: The guide is organized into a phased model, offering a step-by-step approach rather than isolated interventions.
- **Aligned with FPCC and SBC strategies**: Ensures coherence with social and behaviour change (SBC) frameworks, the Mind–Heart Dialogue model, and policy engagement goals.

Addressing the 10 Core Challenges in Faith Engagement on Harmful Practices

Faith engagement offers transformative potential in ending harmful practices like FGM and child marriage. However, the process is rarely straightforward. Programmes often face deep-rooted social, theological, institutional, and logistical challenges that require sustained, adaptive, and trust-based engagement. This chapter presents ten of the most persistent challenges and summarizes how this guide responds to each one through structured, faith-sensitive approaches. *For more background, programmatic examples, and theological context for each challenge, refer to the full [Review of Effective Faith Engagement Strategies for Addressing Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation](#).*

The challenges outlined in this chapter also represent key programming risks. These include backlash against faith leaders, exclusion of underrepresented voices, and the risk of externally imposed narratives. Each phase of this guide includes strategies to anticipate and mitigate these risks, including trust-building, co-creation, gradual roll-out, peer support, and adaptive learning. Users are encouraged to revisit risk considerations throughout the implementation process using tools such as the Real-Time Feedback Guide and the Community Monitoring Toolkit.

The 10 Core Challenges and How This Guide Responds

Challenge	How This Guide Responds
1. Faith actors are often brought in late or treated as ‘messengers’ rather than co-designers	Phase 1 (Pre-Design) of this guide begins with relationship-building and mapping using the <i>Faith Actor Influence and Resistance Mapping Tool</i> . Phase 2 (Design) promotes co-design with faith actors through the <i>Human-Centred Design Guide for Faith Engagement</i> .
2. Harmful practices are sometimes justified using religious texts	Phase 1 (Pre-Design) of this guide includes the <i>Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards</i> to support theological reinterpretation. These tools help leaders ground protective messages in scripture and shared values. The guide affirms that neither the Qur’an nor the Bible mandates FGM. On child marriage, religious texts emphasize maturity and consent, as reflected in Qur’an 4:6 and Ephesians 5:25. Protection, not harm, is a core religious duty, with verses such as Qur’an 2:195 and Matthew 19:14 reinforcing the moral imperative to safeguard life and dignity.
3. Women and youth are underrepresented in faith leadership spaces	This guide prioritizes women and youth faith leaders in both co-design and implementation. Phase 2 (Design) promotes inclusive engagement through the <i>Women’s Empowerment & Faith Reflection Module</i> and the <i>Youth-Led Dialogue & Innovation Toolkit</i> .
4. Faith leaders may support harmful practices due to social pressure or institutional norms	Phase 1 (Pre-Design) of this guide helps identify institutional resistance using the <i>Faith Actor Mapping Tool</i> . Phase 2 (Design) includes <i>Faith Leader Training</i> to build confidence and conviction.
5. Legal frameworks are not always aligned with faith messaging	Phase 1 (Pre-Design) of this guide applies the <i>Faith-Sensitive Legal Entry Points Tool</i> to identify openings. Phase 3 (Implementation) bridges legal and faith messages through the <i>Faith-Led Policy Advocacy Toolkit</i> .
6. Misinformation spreads through religious networks (online & offline)	Phase 3 (Implementation) of this guide includes the <i>Digital Advocacy and Myth-Busting Guide</i> , which equips faith actors to challenge myths in sermons, WhatsApp groups, or other digital platforms.
7. Interfaith tensions can limit coordination and credibility	Phase 3 (Implementation) of this guide introduces the <i>MFACC Coordination Framework</i> to foster collaboration, joint planning, and shared advocacy across faiths.
8. Harmful practices evolve in response to legal and social pressure (e.g. cross-border FGM, medicalization)	Phase 3 (Implementation) tools in this guide, such as the <i>Faith-Led Policy Advocacy Toolkit</i> and the <i>MFACC Framework</i> , help address emerging forms of harm through adaptable strategies and coordinated advocacy.
9. Programmes often lack faith-sensitive MEAL systems	Phase 4 (MEAL) of this guide introduces the <i>Faith-Based MEAL Framework</i> to support values-aligned monitoring, learning, and adaptation.
10. Funding and programme timelines rarely match the time needed for norm change	All four phases of this guide are designed for iterative, long-term engagement, with Social and Community Listening (Phase 1 Pre-Design and 4 MEAL) used to capture evolving community dynamics and feedback.

Deep Dive: Addressing Resistance & Pushback

Efforts to eliminate harmful practices often encounter pushback, especially when they challenge deeply held religious beliefs, community norms, or institutional hierarchies. In faith-led efforts, resistance may arise not only from external actors but also from within faith institutions themselves.

Resistance to change is not a failure of programming; it is a sign that norms are being questioned, often for the first time. For faith actors, this pushback is not only institutional or social, but deeply spiritual. Addressing it requires more than messaging strategies; it requires theological resilience and a reimagining of faith leadership as a moral calling.

In many religious traditions, change is portrayed not as confrontation but as a return to sacred values: to justice, mercy, and the protection of the vulnerable. Resistance is part of the spiritual journey, a moment to revisit scripture,

listen deeply, and act with compassion. As one RfP reflection put it, “*Faith-led change is not about fighting tradition. It is about reclaiming it.*”

Faith leaders who encounter opposition may draw strength from the stories of prophets and reformers who also faced doubt, isolation, and backlash. Equipping them with scriptural and spiritual framing, such as reminding them that “Allah commands justice and good conduct” (Qur’an 16:90) or that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18), can transform resistance into a space for reflection and realignment.

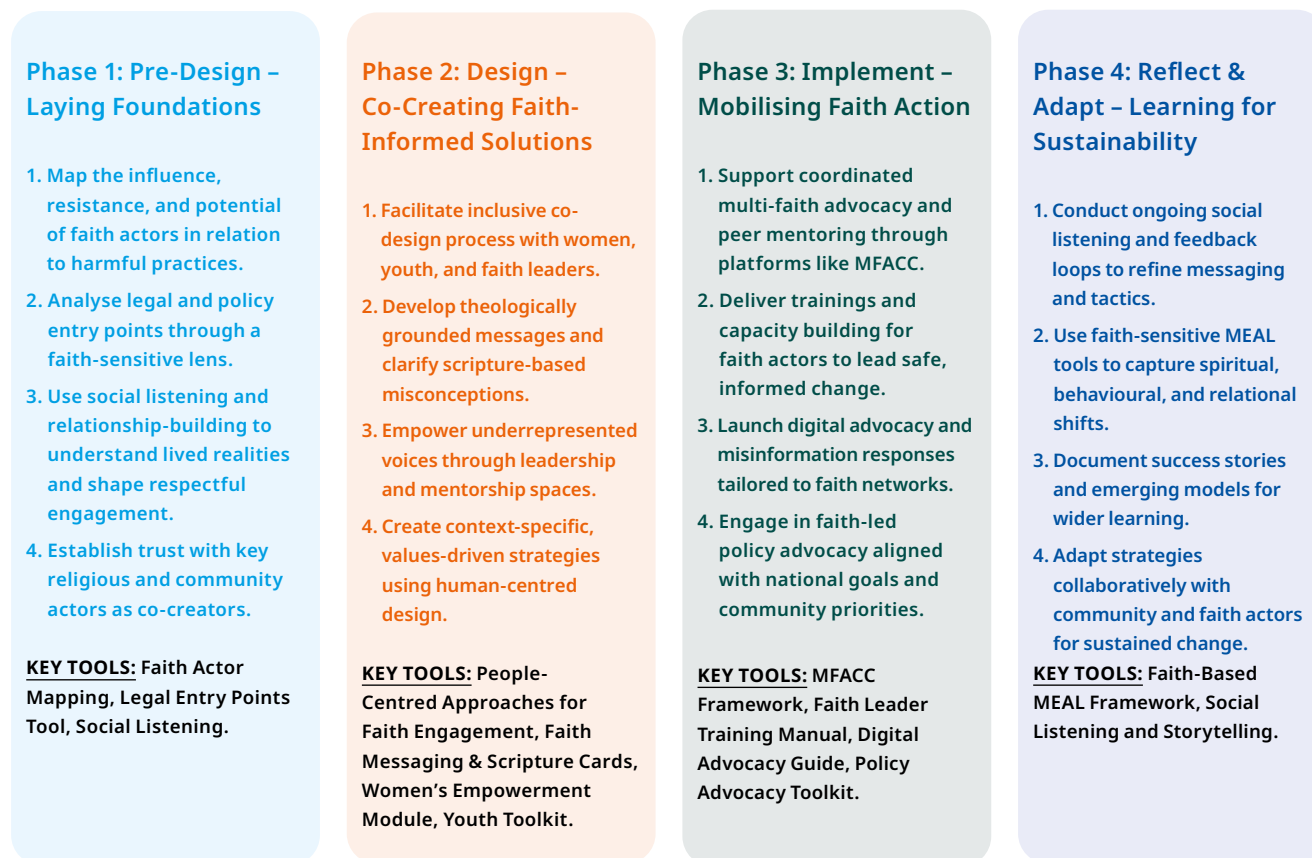
By approaching resistance not as a wall, but as a threshold, this guide encourages faith actors to engage with empathy, humility, and unwavering commitment to protection and dignity. The table below outlines common forms of pushback and how this guide responds:

Form of Pushback	What This Means	How This Guide Responds
Faith-based justification of harmful practices	Harmful practices are defended using religious texts or traditions.	Phase 1 (Pre-Design) introduces the <i>Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards</i> to promote reinterpretation of the faith. These tools equip leaders to uphold protection values while maintaining theological legitimacy.
Resistance from within religious institutions	Faith leaders may be discouraged or penalized by senior religious authorities for taking a stand against harmful practices.	Phase 1 (Pre-Design) identifies institutional dynamics via the <i>Faith Actor Mapping Tool</i> . Phase 2 (Design) strengthens resilience through the <i>Faith Leader Training Manual</i> .
Community backlash against leaders or survivors	Leaders who advocate change may face reputational risk or loss of trust. Survivors may be stigmatized.	Phase 3 (Implementation) introduces community-led dialogues and declarations to shift collective norms and reduce individual burden. It also supports collective norm-shifting through MFACC collaboration and narrative reframing via <i>Digital Advocacy Tools</i> .
Perception of faith engagement as donor-driven	Community members may view elimination efforts as externally imposed, particularly when linked to what they perceive as Western agendas.	The guide embeds co-creation from Phase 1 (Pre-Design) onward. All tools and messaging are grounded in local scripture, community values, and contextual dialogue. Phase 1 (Pre-Design) emphasizes co-creation and trust-building using tools like the <i>Human-Centred Design Guide</i> and <i>Faith Mapping</i> .
Pushback from male-dominated leadership structures	Gender-sensitive reforms may be blocked by gatekeepers within male-led religious hierarchies.	Phase 2 (Design) promotes inclusive leadership development for women and supports inclusive reform via the <i>Women’s Empowerment Module</i> and <i>Faith Leader Training tool</i> .
Silencing or exclusion of youth voices	Young people challenging harmful norms may be labelled as disrespectful or disconnected from tradition.	Phase 2 (Design) includes the <i>Youth-Led Dialogue and Innovation Toolkit</i> , which enables peer-led engagement and innovation. Peer networks offer safety and support.

Programme Phases

This programme is implemented through a **phased, adaptive approach** that allows communities and faith actors to build trust, reflect, and act at their own pace.

Figure 3: The four phases of the Programme



Safeguarding, Confidentiality, and Privacy

This guide follows the UNICEF Policy on Safeguarding, the Core Commitments for Children (CCCs), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights, and safety of all participants, especially children and youth.

What this means for programme activities:

- **Before activities:** Ensure venues are safe and private. Explain the purpose of the activity and obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children. Clarify how information will be used, and that participation is voluntary. Set up referral pathways that can be activated if needed.
- **During activities:** Avoid asking for personal or sensitive details in group settings. Encourage sharing of experiences without naming others. If someone begins to disclose abuse ensure that referral pathways are in place. If you take photos or videos, ensure that survivors' faces are not visible or obscured.
- **After activities:** Keep notes anonymous. Do not include names or identifying details in reports. If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately.

Safeguarding is also a spiritual duty: to protect, not harm; to respect privacy; and to create safe, inclusive spaces where children, youth, women, and survivors are heard.

PHASE 1 – PRE-DESIGN: Mapping Influence & Understanding Resistance

To lay the foundation for faith-sensitive programming by identifying key faith actors, understanding their influence and resistance dynamics, and assessing legal, social, and theological entry points for intervention.

1.1. Mapping Faith Influence and Resistance

What this means:

Mapping is not just a technical step; it is the beginning of a relational process. It identifies who holds moral, social, and theological authority across family, community, and institutional levels, and whether that authority supports or resists protection. Influence is rarely linear, and it is shaped by factors such as gender, age, denomination, lived experience, and local trust.

Some faith leaders carry theological legitimacy but may lack moral credibility or grass-roots presence. Others, especially women, youth, or Indigenous actors, may have high influence but be invisible in formal structures.

Resistance is not always theological; it can stem from fear of backlash, misinformation, institutional dynamics, or discomfort with change. Resistance can take the form of renewed religious narratives, silence, and distrust. Recognizing these early signals is essential to enabling a locally owned journey of change.

How to do it:

- Use Tool 1 – *Faith Actor Influence & Resistance Mapping* to analyse formal and informal networks.
- Map by gender, generation, denomination, geography, and social roles, not just by title.
- Distinguish between theological authority (e.g., scriptural expertise), moral credibility (e.g., pastoral trust), and social reach (e.g., WhatsApp groups, radio influence).
- Include minority, traditional and indigenous leaders, informal actors (e.g., prayer group leaders, spiritual healers), and survivor-led faith engagement.
- Overlay the mapping with pushback early warning indicators.

What to look for:

- Who is trusted to speak on protection? Who is listened to on morality, family, women, or youth issues?
- What scriptures or narratives are used to justify or resist change?
- Who has shifted their position over time, and why?
- Are there visible signs of resistance, such as silence, withdrawal, distrust, or a revival of justifying narratives?

TOOL 1

Faith Actor Influence & Resistance Mapping Tool



Spotting Early Warning Signs of Pushback

How to identify when resistance is building, before it escalates

Even when faith actors express support for ending harmful practices, underlying resistance may still exist, and can resurface in new or unexpected ways. Identifying early warning signs allows programmes to respond with empathy, dialogue, and strategy.

What to Look For

These subtle cues often signal that resistance is brewing:

- 1. Shifts in religious messaging:** Sermons or faith discussions begin to revive justifications for FGM/child marriage or frame them as cultural/religious obligations.
- 2. Increased silence:** Faith leaders who were previously vocal become less engaged, avoid certain topics, or drop out of joint initiatives.
- 3. New or renewed debates:** Study groups or WhatsApp forums circulate questions about whether international efforts are 'foreign agendas'.
- 4. Reputation anxiety:** Leaders privately express fear of backlash, losing congregants, or going against senior clergy.
- 5. Gendered exclusions:** Women and youth who were engaged in earlier phases are quietly removed from planning or messaging spaces.
- 6. Social media defensiveness:** Rise in online posts defending 'tradition', discrediting FBOs, or mocking faith-aligned protection messaging.

Where to Spot It

- Study circles, pulpit announcements, interfaith forums
- Local WhatsApp groups, community radio, and religious Facebook pages
- MFACC meetings and training sessions
- Informal feedback from survivors, youth, or trusted allies

Spiritual Resistance: What Are We Really Listening For?

Resistance isn't just about who says 'yes' or 'no'. It's about what truths are being tested. Are faith actors resisting because they fear backlash? Are they protecting tradition, or misunderstanding it?

Ask:

- Is this theological resistance or social pressure in disguise?
- What moral concerns are being voiced behind the 'no'?
- Can scripture offer reassurance instead of rebuttal?

Listening well in Phase 1 means listening to people's fears and their faith.

1.2. Legal and Policy Coordination and Analysis

What this means:

Legal bans on harmful practices are important, but they are only effective when they are known, trusted, and enforced in ways that align with people's moral frameworks and lived realities. This phase maps not only the content of the law, but also how it is understood, debated, and resisted in faith communities.

In many contexts, legal pressure leads to the **adaptation** rather than the abandonment of harmful practices (e.g., FGM being carried out at younger ages and without ceremonies/in secret, increased medicalization or cross-border FGM). In others, it creates **perceived conflict between faith and state**, especially when legal frameworks are not explained in culturally or theologically grounded ways.

Legal coordination and analysis must include both **statutory law** and **religious rulings**, such as fatwas, pastoral letters, or customary codes.

It must also map where **justice is accessed**; not just through courts or clinics, but through councils, mosques, churches, elders, and community mediators. This also includes bridging the participation of faith actors in government-led coordination mechanisms on child protection and the abandonment of harmful practices.

How to do it:

- Use Tool 2 – *Faith-Sensitive Legal Entry Points Tool* to map formal and informal justice systems.
- Analyse statutory laws on FGM, child marriage, consent, age, and bodily integrity.
- Map religious rulings, declarations, or institutional statements on protection and harmful practices.
- Identify contradictions, confusion, or silence in public and faith-based discourse.
- Document where communities go for help, and what guidance they receive.

TOOL 2

[Faith-Sensitive Legal Entry Points](#)

Faith Resistance is a Risk – And a Signpost

Use the actions suggested below to anticipate where protection messages may be challenged and how to respond constructively, early, and together.

Why it matters:

Pushback is rarely sudden. It builds through narratives, silence, fatigue, or shifts in religious discourse. Early warning signs include religious opposition, mistrust of external actors, and narrative shifts in communities. Detecting these signs early enables faith leaders and programme actors to act with care, strategy, and community backing.

1. Signals of Emerging Pushback

What to Look For	Examples of what it can look like	Where to Monitor
New or revived faith arguments defending FGM/child marriage	Framing protective laws as fighting our religion	Sermons, study circles, WhatsApp threads
Growing silence or withdrawal from previously supportive leaders	Religious leaders start avoiding mention of protection messages	Training sessions, MFACC meetings
'Foreign agenda' framing of rights language	Laws protective girls, women and boys are framed as contrary to culture, and externally imposed	Social media, local radio, town halls
Fatigue or discomfort among faith leaders	Leaders hesitate to engage on the issue	Faith dialogues, storytelling circles
Use of 'respect for culture' to deflect change	Protective laws and messages are described as a threat to tradition and culture	Grandmother-led or elder group meetings

2. Social and Community Listening Prompts

Reflect on the following questions to identify latent resistance:

- “What are people saying about laws or rules from outside?”
- “What types of conversations are being held by men, women and youth on the subject in social media?”
- “How do people feel about discussing these topics in public today vs. a few years ago?”
- “Have any respected leaders changed their stance recently?”
- “Are people more vocal or more cautious about saying what they think?”

3. Preventive Measures (Proactive Faith Engagement)

- Establish faith-based monitoring groups through MFACCs or trusted leaders to detect discourse shifts.
- Invite quiet, closed-door theological reflection when discomfort arises publicly (e.g. ‘dialogue under the tree’).
- Include youth and women’s networks to detect unspoken resistance emerging in less visible groups.
- Regularly update resistance risk maps using feedback from social and community listening, as outlined in Tool 3.

4. When Pushback Emerges: What to Do

Action	Purpose
Pause messaging, resume trust-building	Avoid entrenching resistance
Co-develop a local position paper with faith actors	Reframe protection in faith terms
Use narrative approaches (Tool 6 + storytelling)	Humanize and depolarize the issue

1.3. Social and Community Listening and Digital Monitoring

What this means:

Social and community listening is not just about monitoring trends; it is about staying attuned to the evolving narratives, doubts, and signals of resistance or readiness within communities. In contexts where harmful practices are shifting and not disappearing, digital and offline discourse provides early clues of adaptation, backlash, or momentum.

Faith actors operate in deeply conversational spaces through sermons, prayer groups, WhatsApp chains, and pulpit announcements. Monitoring these spaces can reveal how protective norms are received, contested, or reshaped in real time. Digital listening in particular allows programme actors and faith leaders to detect not only what is being said, but **also how** it is being said, when, **why**, and **who supports it**.

How to do it:

- Use the Tool 3 – *Social and Community Listening Framework Tool* to set up structured monitoring of local digital spaces (Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp groups, radio talk shows).
- Track recurring language, faith references, hashtags, or rumours linked to FGM, child marriage, alternative rites of passage (ARP), or policy changes.
- Complement online monitoring with offline listening in trusted religious spaces.
- Involve local youth, women, and faith actors in co-analysing the signals: *what’s changing, what’s spreading?*

TOOL 3

[Social and Community Listening](#)

Why it matters

Faith messaging succeeds when it resonates, not when it repeats. Social and community listening helps detect whether people are quoting a sermon with pride, questioning it in private, or resharing it with irony or resistance. By analysing digital and interpersonal reactions, facilitators can **adapt messages, anticipate backlash**, and identify moments of opportunity.

In The Gambia, we missed early signs – sermons changed tone, WhatsApp groups got more defensive, but we weren't tracking. By the time the repeal (of the ant-FGM law) gained ground, it was already too late to shift the story.
— Programme staff reflection

Build Local Listening Ecosystems

Social and community listening is strongest when it is localized. Equip MFACCs, youth ministries, and women's networks to track and reflect on narratives monthly. What's being said at weddings, in faith-based schools, or during fasting sermons? Are online campaigns being reshared or dismissed? The goal is not surveillance. The goal is discernment, listening for what hearts are wrestling with, so that programmes walk alongside, not ahead.

1.4. Relationship-Building with Faith Actors and Networks

What this means:

Programmes succeed when faith actors are not just implementers but **co-leaders** in shaping vision, strategy, and reflection. Building relationships with faith institutions, networks, and leaders is foundational to ensuring lasting protection and norm change. This work is relational before it is technical.

Many faith actors have decades of experience addressing social and moral challenges, but they may feel sidelined, misunderstood, or overwhelmed by externally framed initiatives. True partnership begins with **listening, respect, and a long-term commitment**, rather than one-off project consultations.

It also requires **diversity and equity**: engaging women, youth, Indigenous leaders, minority denominations, and informal or lay faith actors, not only senior clerics or male gatekeepers.

How to do it:

Use Tool 4 – *Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards* to engage actors throughout these steps.

- Map and consult formal and informal faith institutions (e.g., councils, seminaries, mothers' unions, youth groups, religious schools).

- Initiate trust-building conversations before presenting programme goals. Ask: What role has faith played in protecting or harming children? What changes are already happening?
- Include faith-based women's groups, youth leaders, and spiritual elders from the outset, not just during validation or roll-out.
- Where possible, engage faith actors in co-creating the programme approach, including vision, messaging, tools, and reflection cycles.
- Establish long-term dialogue spaces, such as MFACCs or faith study circles, to sustain relationships over time.

If faith actors feel programmes are temporary, extractive, or externally owned, they are less likely to invest their authority or risk backlash. However, when relationships are founded on **trust, shared learning, and theological ownership**, faith networks become multipliers of protection, sustaining the work beyond any single project.

As one interfaith leader reflected, *"We do not start with the project. We start with the person, and with prayer."* Early engagements should affirm shared commitments to child dignity, communal care, and protection as sacred duties, not just programmatic goals.

TOOL 4

[Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards](#)

PHASE 2 – DESIGN: Co-Designing Faith-Based Interventions

To co-design inclusive, theologically grounded, and context-specific interventions that reflect the values, priorities, and realities of faith communities and promote the sustained abandonment of harmful practices.

2.1. Training and Preparation of Faith Leaders

What this means:

Training is not a transfer of knowledge; it is a transformation of perspective and an acquisition of skills. For faith leaders to become agents of protection, they need space to reflect theologically, listen compassionately, and speak out with moral clarity. Effective preparation blends **scriptural integrity, facilitation skills, and deep community insight**.

This contributes to programming **Outcomes 1 (Capacity) and 2 (Community Engagement)** by equipping diverse faith actors, including women, youth, and informal leaders, to engage with harmful practices within their own traditions and teachings.

How to do it:

- Use Tool 5 – *Faith Leader Training Guide* to structure participatory, modular sessions.
- Apply the *Mind-Heart-Faith* methodology:
 - **Mind:** Legal, health, and social norms content
 - **Heart:** Lived experience, testimony, dialogue
 - **Faith:** Scriptural reflection, theological argumentation, and sermon co-creation
- Include practical modules on safeguarding, active listening, facilitation, digital engagement, and referral pathways.
- Tailor trainings to different levels of influence from senior clerics to youth preachers, lay leaders, and women-led circles.
- Create safe, spiritually rooted spaces for internal questioning and peer learning.
- Integrate Reflect-Act-Reflect cycles through follow-up groups, peer mentoring, and WhatsApp communities.

Many faith leaders are already questioning harmful practices but lack the necessary language, peer support, or scriptural backing to take action. Others fear backlash or isolation. A training space that honours their faith, listens to their doubts, and co-creates messages they can own becomes a turning point, not just a workshop.

TOOL 5

[Faith Leader Training Guide \(Facilitator Resource\)](#)

2.2. People-Centred Approaches for Faith Engagement

What this means:

People-centred approaches are not about extracting ideas from communities; they are about accompanying them in reflecting, imagining, and creating faith-aligned solutions to harmful practices. These approaches build empathy, trust, and ownership by grounding programme design in people's lived experiences, spiritual language, and moral frameworks.

This contributes to **Outcomes 2 (Community Engagement) and 4 (Systems Change)** by ensuring that faith leaders, women, youth, and survivors are not consulted at the margins but **are integral to the design** of context-relevant, sustainable interventions.

In many settings, local actors have described past efforts as externally imposed or overly focused on messaging by outsiders. In contrast, this approach enables:

- **Faith actor agency and leadership:** Recognizing the moral authority and relational networks of faith actors, especially at the local level.
- **Community ownership:** Empowering communities themselves to define problems, generate ideas, and test solutions, especially with women and youth leading the change.
- **Localization and sustainability:** Shifting from short-term engagement to community-anchored transformation, with faith institutions as long-term allies.
- **Survivor inclusion:** Creating space for survivors' stories and lived experiences to shape solutions and challenge harmful norms directly.

By using people-centred approaches, programmes move beyond raising awareness and towards co-creating culturally rooted, faith-anchored pathways for real change.

How to do it:

Use Tool 6 – *People-Centred Approaches for Faith Engagement*, which provides a menu of simple activities that faith leaders and facilitators can choose from.

- **Start with people:** Begin with listening and empathy, not solutions.
- **Keep it simple:** Use activities you can facilitate with confidence.
- **Always test and reflect:** Any new message, activity, or sermon must be tried with a small group first, seeking their inputs and feedback and adjusted as needed before wider use.
- **Link to other tools:** Many activities connect with other parts of this Guide (e.g., *Tool 4 – Scripture Cards*, *Tool 10 – Policy Advocacy*, *Tool 11 – Digital Advocacy*, *Tool 12 – R-A-R*).

Menu of Approaches

- **Listening & Empathy**
 - *Storytelling Circles:* Invite personal stories.
 - *Shared Values Dialogue:* Use scripture and proverbs to surface protective values.
 - *Youth Expression:* Art, poems, or skits to hear young voices.
- **Understanding & Insight**
 - *Dialogue Wall:* “What we want to protect / What we fear to lose.”
 - *Problem Statement Builder:* Create short, values-based statements about what needs to change.
- **Generating Ideas**
 - *Idea Brainstorm (“How might we...?”):* Turn problems into questions and co-create solutions.
 - *Scenario Walkthroughs:* Imagine how new ideas would play out in daily life.
- **Testing, Reflection & Commitment**
 - *Mini-Pilots:* Try out a message, sermon, or activity with a small group.
 - *Commitment & Integration:* Leaders and groups commit to actions (e.g., sermons, mentoring, campaigns) and embed new practices into regular worship, youth groups, or community routines.

TOOL 6

People-Centred Approaches for Faith Engagement

2.3. Engaging Women and Youth Faith Leaders

What this means:

Women and youth are often at the forefront of moral and social issues within their faith communities, leading prayer groups, mentoring peers, and shaping informal norms. Yet they are frequently excluded from formal religious decision-making spaces, especially when it comes to sensitive topics like FGM and child marriage. Engaging them early, meaningfully, and with dignity is essential for sustainable social norm change.

When women and youth faith actors are trusted to speak from their own lived experience, grounded in scripture and spiritual authority, they shift norms from within. Their leadership challenges stigma, builds empathy, and models generational transformation.

This contributes to Outcome 1 (Capacity) and Outcome 2 (Community Engagement) by recognizing women and youth faith actors as change agents, not just as beneficiaries or support roles. It also supports Outcome 4 (Systems Change) by challenging exclusionary structures and creating space for intergenerational, gender-inclusive faith leadership.

How to do it:

Use Tool 7 – *Women’s Empowerment & Faith Reflection Module* and Tool 8 – *Youth-Led Dialogue and Innovation Toolkit* to engage women and youth leaders while establishing the following steps:

- **Map and Engage Diverse Women and Youth Faith Leaders**
 - Identify both formal (e.g. youth pastors, mothers’ unions, girls’ prayer leaders) and informal influencers (e.g. youth mentors, interfaith activists).
 - Ensure diversity across denominations, sects, age groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
 - Involve women and youth early, not only in training or validation, but in scoping, co-design, and message development.
- **Create Safe, Inclusive Spaces for Dialogue and Co-Design**
 - Facilitate small-group dialogues or reflection circles grounded in scripture, lived experience, and local proverbs.

- Allow space to explore how faith intersects with gender roles, protection, tradition, and power, including the tensions and trauma that arise from these intersections.
- Use participatory tools such as vision boards, storytelling circles, and values mapping to uncover what truly matters.
- **Co-Develop Roles Women and Youth Can Lead**
 - Support women and youth in leading dialogues, co-facilitating training, engaging in digital campaigns, or developing locally relevant materials.
 - Establish mentorship connections between older and younger faith leaders to bridge traditions and foster leadership development pathways.
 - Promote visibility of their messages across faith platforms, from sermons to social media to interfaith events.
- **Make Messaging Youth- and Women-Centred**
 - Design content with and for them, using formats and tones that resonate with their realities (e.g., storytelling, music, visual media).
 - Pair moral framing with faith-anchored protection values (e.g. dignity, mercy, honour) that resonate across age and gender.

TOOL 7[Women's Empowerment & Faith Reflection Module](#)**TOOL 8**[Youth-Led Dialogue & Innovation Toolkit](#)

PHASE 3 – IMPLEMENTATION: Rolling Out Faith-Based Interventions

To implement co-designed, faith-led strategies through inclusive dialogue, advocacy, and public commitments using a phased, adaptive, and locally grounded approach that enables sustainable norm change.

3.1 Faith-Based Community Dialogues

What this means:

Faith-led community dialogues are public, inclusive spaces rooted in values and scripture where harmful norms can be challenged, and collective reflection encouraged. They are based on the messages, tools, and leadership prepared in earlier phases, and serve as the bridge between belief and behaviour change.

Policy won't change a practice if the people aren't ready. But a dialogue grounded in scripture, trust, and reflection can begin to shift what people see as normal, expected, sacred, or possible. It invites communities to lead their own transformation, rather than simply adopting someone else's solution.

Dialogue is not debate; it is a space for truth, grace, and growth. Use the learnings and methods from the Phase 1 and Phase 2 tools.

Why faith-based dialogues work:

- They build on the trust and moral credibility of faith leaders.
- They allow harmful practices to be discussed without imposition.
- They create space for survivors, women, and youth to be heard.
- They draw on local values and scriptures to reframe harmful norms.
- They build a foundation for faith-led advocacy, alternatives, and referrals.

How to do it:

- **Create trusted spaces for honest conversation**
 - Conduct dialogues in familiar settings, such as places of worship, study circles, youth groups, or under community trees.
 - Begin with scripture, prayer, or spiritual reflection to establish a grounded tone.

- Ensure mixed participation (including women, youth, elders, and minority voices) or hold separate sessions where necessary for safety.
- **Use values and storytelling as entry points**
 - Begin with storytelling, not statistics; let real lives, parables, and faith teachings lead the way.
 - Select tools in the Appendix to guide the discussion, such as faith messaging and scripture cards, storytelling circles, or value mapping.
 - Invite reflection, not confrontation. Ask: “What does our faith ask of us here?”
- **Facilitate with Mind–Heart–Faith Approach**
 - **Mind:** Introduce health and legal facts as background, not the focus.
 - **Heart:** Hold space for emotion, silence, testimony, and pastoral presence.
 - **Faith:** Encourage reflection on scripture, theological questions, and reinterpretation.
- **Document and reflect without pressure**
 - Use participatory notes, voice memos, or reflection walls to track themes.
 - Follow up through peer study groups, MFACCs, or leadership dialogues to deepen learning.
 - Don't rush to an agreement; the goal is a shift, not consensus.

3.2. Faith-Based Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP)

What this means:

Harmful practices like FGM are often embedded in rites of passage that mark transition, identity, and belonging. In some contexts, communities are seeking faith-aligned, protective alternatives that retain positive social meaning while rejecting harm. However, ARP approaches should not be assumed to be universally effective or stand-alone solutions.

This contributes to Outcome 2 (Community Engagement) by enabling community reflection and adaptation of traditions, and Outcome 4 (Systems Change) by anchoring alternatives in spiritual legitimacy and local structures, where context allows.

Caution: ARPs are not a silver bullet

While alternative rites of passage (ARPs) have gained visibility, **rigorous evaluations have shown mixed or limited effectiveness**. According to the *UNICEF Innocenti What Works* review (2025),⁸ ARPs:

- Often raise awareness but **do not address the underlying social drivers** (e.g. marriageability, peer pressure, stigma).
- Are frequently implemented in isolation from broader community mobilization or systems change.
- Risk **being used as a compliance mechanism** (e.g. for funding or reporting) rather than as a meaningful social norm intervention.

In Kenya, for example, ARPs have been adopted in some areas, but FGM continues in secret, particularly for younger girls who did not go through the 'real' rite.

ARPs should be explored **only in contexts where a ceremonial structure already exists and communities themselves express readiness** for an alternative, not as a default or donor-driven solution.

How to do it:

- **Co-create alternatives only where appropriate**
 - Explore with communities whether an alternative rite is meaningful and wanted, not imposed.
 - Discuss what values or transitions are being honoured in the original rite (e.g. maturity, purity, blessing), and how these could be celebrated differently.
- **Anchor alternatives in faith, not formality**
 - Work with religious scholars to frame rites around protection, dignity, and growth using scripture (e.g. “We have honoured the children of Adam” – Qur’an 17:70).
 - Focus on blessings, mentorship, and moral education, not ritual replication.
- **Ensure broad participation**
 - Involve girls, mothers, faith leaders, grandmothers, elders, boys and men in the co-design process. Engage traditional leaders – both women and men – who hold cultural authority over rites of passage, to ensure that ARPs are socially anchored and respected. Their participation helps bridge faith and tradition and strengthens local legitimacy.
 - Address potential stigma for girls who go through ARPs by fostering public endorsement and inclusion in community events, ensuring that protective alternatives are recognized as meaningful and honourable transitions.
- **Link to life skills and support systems**
 - Pair ARPs with access to education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, spiritual mentorship, and referral pathways.
 - Use them as an entry point, not a substitute for broader gender and norm change work.
- **Monitor for risks of reinforcement or reversion**
 - Track whether ARPs are unintentionally legitimizing FGM (e.g. being used as cover while FGM continues).
 - Ensure ARPs are not promoted in isolation from wider work on social norms, theology, and the law.

3.3. Addressing Medicalization of FGM

What this means:

Medicalization refers to the practice of FGM being performed by health professionals. While framed as harm reduction, medicalized FGM continues to violate rights, cause lifelong trauma, and delay true abandonment.

Medicalization is increasing in many contexts as a reaction to legal bans, social pressure, or changing narratives, and is sometimes falsely legitimized through faith-based arguments. Addressing it requires coordinated action across the health and faith sectors, rooted in community understanding and moral clarity.

This contributes to Outcomes 1 (Capacity) and 4 (Systems Change) by building a shared, faith-informed rejection of medicalized harm and supporting health–faith partnerships to shift practice and perception.

How to do it:

- **Expose the false safety narrative**
 - Develop messaging that explains medicalized FGM is still FGM, and it carries physical, emotional, and spiritual harm.
 - Use faith language of protection, dignity, and non-harm to reject medicalization morally, not just medically.
- **Engage health, faith, and traditional leaders together**
 - Co-train religious leaders, traditional leaders (both women and men), and health workers using Tool 2 – *Faith-Sensitive Legal Entry Points* and existing referral guides. Inclusive engagement fosters a shared understanding across all spheres of influence – spiritual, cultural, and medical.
 - Frame FGM as a violation of both medical ethics and religious and cultural responsibility, ensuring that all actors reinforce the same protective messages from different angles of authority.
- **Use community-led and faith-based campaigns**
 - Support local design of campaigns using real stories, religious teachings, and medical facts.
 - Disseminate information through trusted platforms, including religious schools, community radio, WhatsApp, clinics, and mosques/churches.
- **Monitor adaptation, not just incidence**
 - Track not only if FGM is happening, but also how it is shifting. Look for signs of private, clinic-based procedures or referrals to out-of-country facilities.
 - Use social listening and MFACC reports to identify shifting narratives.
- **Establish clear accountability mechanisms**
 - Collaborate with professional associations, medical regulators, and faith councils to establish and enforce clear positions against medically induced female genital mutilation.

- Where appropriate, support faith-based declarations condemning the practice.

When FGM shifts behind clinic doors, the harm is hidden but not reduced. Medicalization often gives families and leaders a way to appear compliant while sustaining harmful norms. Challenging it requires clear, co-owned messages from those with both moral and medical authority, and must be done with respect, honesty, and consistency.

3.4. Strengthening Faith Networks to Scale Change

What this means:

Faith-led change must not remain project-based or isolated to individual leaders. For transformation to scale, and last, faith networks themselves must be strengthened as systems capable of sustaining, coordinating, and replicating protective practices, theological reflection, and community mobilization.

This contributes to Outcomes 3 (Coordination) and 4 (Systems Change) by investing in the structures, relationships, and leadership development necessary to embed protection in the day-to-day lives of religious communities and institutions.

How to do it:

Use Tool 9 – *MFACC Coordination Framework* to support strengthening of faith networks:

- **Strengthen and resource MFACCs and interfaith platforms**
 - Support the structure, functionality, and visibility of Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees (MFACCs) or equivalent platforms at local and national levels.
 - Build their ability to coordinate dialogue, monitor trends, facilitate referrals, and co-lead action planning.
 - Ensure inclusive and accountable representation across all dimensions, including gender, age, denomination, and geography.
- **Institutionalize reflection and peer learning**
 - Establish regular interfaith reflections, MFACC review meetings, and learning exchanges between local and regional actors.
 - Use storytelling, testimony, and practice-sharing to document the progress of change and the strategies being employed to address resistance.
 - Enable networks to capture and adapt good practices across contexts.

- **Develop and disseminate faith-based declarations and guidelines**

- Support faith actors in co-developing joint statements, theological guidance notes, or community charters grounded in scripture and moral reasoning.
- Encourage religious councils and seminaries to integrate protection commitments into their training, policies, and accreditation systems.

- **Bridge local networks to national and regional ecosystems**

- Link grass-roots MFACCs with national faith councils, interfaith bodies, and child protection task forces.
- Support cross-border and regional coordination to address trends such as cross-border female genital mutilation (FGM) and digital misinformation.
- Create spaces for shared advocacy with other sectors: health, legal, education, and development actors.

TOOL 9

MFACC Coordination Framework

See also: [Tool 10 - Faith-led Policy Advocacy Toolkit](#); [Tool 7 - Women's Empowerment and Faith Reflection Model](#); and [Tool 8 - Youth-led Dialogue and Innovation Toolkit](#).

3.5. Elevating Survivor Testimonies Within Faith-Based Approaches

Survivors of harmful practices, such as FGM and child marriage, carry lived wisdom that no external expert, policy, or programme can replicate. Their testimonies speak not only to the physical and emotional consequences of harm, but also to the moral and spiritual dissonance that often follows. When these stories are shared in safe and supported ways, they can become powerful instruments of healing, truth-telling, and community transformation.

In many contexts, harmful practices persist in part because of silence, silence rooted in stigma, fear, or the mistaken belief that these experiences are rare or justified. Survivor voices interrupt that silence. They invite others to listen, reflect, and reconsider long-held assumptions. When integrated thoughtfully into faith-based spaces such as storytelling circles, women's fellowships, or pulpit reflections, testimonies can open moral conversations and catalyse both personal and collective change.

Faith actors have a unique role to play in holding space for these testimonies. When religious leaders listen without judgment, validate survivors' experiences through scripture, and call communities to protect rather than harm, they model a theology of care, justice, and accountability. Testimonies, when accompanied by faith framing, do not

merely expose suffering, they invite repentance, recommitment, and reform.

Yet testimony must never be extractive. Survivors are not ‘tools’ to make a point. Their dignity and agency must remain central. Ethical sharing of lived experience requires clear consent, emotional support, and a commitment to protection, even after the story is told.

How to do it:

- **Why use testimonies?**

- Make abstract harms tangible and emotional.
- Challenge denial or misinformation within religious narratives.
- Affirm that survivors are not alone and healing is possible.
- Reframe harmful practices as violations, not virtues.

- **How to do it ethically and meaningfully**

- Never suggest or ask a survivor to share her story. Sharing her story should come from the survivor herself. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige survivors to share their story against their own will.
- Ensure informed consent and control: The survivor should fully understand how their story will be used, and retain the right to withdraw or remain anonymous.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place should the survivor need support as a result of sharing her story.
- Use trusted spaces: Introduce testimonies during scripture dialogues, women's prayer circles, or inter-generational storytelling events, not mass gatherings.
- Surround with theological reflection: Faith leaders should reinforce that compassion, dignity, and justice are sacred obligations (e.g., Micah 6:8, Qur'an 16:90).
- Support after sharing: Provide emotional and spiritual support; consider accompaniment through pastoral care, women's groups, or MFACCs.
- Avoid sensationalism: Focus on lived experience and moral transformation, not shock.

3.6. Faith-Led Policy & Digital Advocacy

What this means:

Faith actors possess unique moral legitimacy and wield a wide-reaching influence. When prepared with the right tools and platforms, they can drive public discourse, shape policy processes, and counter harmful social norms both offline and online. Faith-led advocacy should be grounded in Scripture, informed by community realities, and aligned with protection goals, rather than being externally imposed or reactive.

This contributes to Outcomes 3 (Coordination) and 4 (Systems Change) by enabling faith actors to take a proactive and credible role in influencing child protection policies and digital narratives, aligning with their religious teachings and community values.

How to do it:

- **Train faith actors to engage in public advocacy**

- Use Tool 10 - *Policy Advocacy Toolkit*, to equip leaders with advocacy framing, scriptural messaging, and engagement strategies.
- Integrate policy literacy, rights-based language, and theological grounding through exercises like sermon challenges and scripture-policy pairing.
- Involve women and youth in co-developing advocacy roles and platforms.

- **Support locally rooted faith policy engagement**

- Facilitate joint development of faith-based declarations, interfaith statements, or community charters on protection.
- Connect local faith leaders to national policy processes (e.g. FGM law reform, birth registration, child marriage legislation).
- Ensure that messaging aligns with the voices of survivors, legal standards, and social norms.

- **Enable faith-led digital engagement and response**

- Use Tool 11 – *Digital Advocacy and Myth-Busting Guide*, to train leaders in identifying, verifying, and countering misinformation, including cases where false information is unintentionally shared due to a lack of awareness. Equip faith leaders with critical digital literacy skills to assess sources, check content credibility, and understand the risks of amplification.
- Promote ethical, faith-sensitive storytelling on platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, community radio, and live-streamed sermons.
- Monitor digital trends and feedback using social listening techniques to adapt messages in real time.

- **Promote peer learning and faith-led coordination**

- Create spaces for MFACCs and interfaith platforms to share advocacy approaches, digital campaigns, and policy entry points.
- Link national and regional faith actors to strengthen theological consensus and visibility.

TOOL 10

[Policy Advocacy Toolkit](#)

TOOL 11

[Digital Advocacy and Myth-Busting Guide](#)

PHASE 4 – MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY & LEARNING (MEAL)

Sustaining Change Through Faith-Led Accountability and Learning

This final phase focuses on building sustainable, faith-rooted systems for monitoring, reflection, and accountability. It ensures that efforts to end harmful practices do not fade with the project cycle, but are embedded in community life, theological values, and institutional practice.

This chapter supports implementation of the separate FPCC-adapted MEAL Framework with indicators and data collection methods. It focuses on faith-led accountability and learning practices grounded in trust, values, and dialogue. It recognizes that sustainable, long-term impact depends not only on strong technical systems, but on embedding faith-led reflection, monitoring, and institutional learning into spiritual routines and leadership structures.

MEAL becomes a moral and spiritual practice: one that strengthens accountability to communities, supports real-time adaptation, and lays the foundation for institutionalizing change beyond the life of the programme.

Faith-Led Accountability: Grounding MEAL in Spiritual and Moral Responsibility

Faith leaders are already accountable to their congregations, to God or the Prophet, and to their own sense of moral duty. Faith-led MEAL should build on this existing sense of responsibility, rather than impose external systems. It should reframe monitoring and evaluation as part of spiritual leadership: an act of stewardship, care, and truth-telling in service of children and community.

Rather than focusing only on indicators and compliance, this approach recognizes that moral clarity, scriptural grounding, and trust-based relationships are equally important. Faith actors can be trained not only to report progress but also to lead reflection circles, facilitate listening sessions, and support community dialogue about what is working and what needs to change.

Where possible, community-led monitoring should be formalized through platforms like MFACCs, interfaith councils, or women's and youth groups. These structures can review progress, elevate concerns, and co-develop action

plans grounded not only in programme targets, but also in values such as justice, mercy, and protection.

How to do it:

- Use scripture to frame accountability as a shared moral commitment (e.g. justice, stewardship, safeguarding).
- Support faith leaders in facilitating reflective, community-based feedback loops (e.g., dialogue forums, monthly check-ins, post-sermon reflections).
- Collaborate with MFACCs and other local bodies to integrate monitoring and learning into existing religious platforms.
- Introduce simple, participatory monitoring tools that faith actors can adapt to their context and literacy level.

When framed around dignity and protection, MEAL is not just about measuring change; it is also about ensuring that it is implemented effectively. It becomes an integral part of how faith leaders fulfil their role.

Community Feedback and Real-Time Adaptation

Sustainable change is not delivered; it is co-owned, questioned, and adapted in real time. For faith engagement to remain effective, communities must have regular, trusted ways to reflect on progress, raise concerns, and shape what happens next.

This means building feedback mechanisms that are accessible, valued, and rooted in existing social and spiritual structures. Not every community will use written forms or digital tools; what matters is that they are heard, safe, and taken seriously.

Real-time adaptation also requires that faith actors, MFACCs, and programme partners are willing to adjust when resistance, fatigue, or backlash emerges. Tools and messages must evolve with shifting dynamics, whether due to seasonal rituals, misinformation, political pressure, or theological disputes.

How to do it:

- Use Tool 12 – *Reflect-Act-Reflect Accountability Tool*
- Create feedback spaces that reflect the context, such as post-sermon conversations, women's tea circles, youth forums, or interfaith town halls.
- Introduce simple tools (e.g. *reflection cards, storytelling circles, voice note logs*) to capture honest reactions and emerging tensions.
- Set up regular MFACC review meetings to assess what is working, what is unclear, and where more support is needed.
- Track signals of pushback or disengagement, such as silence, sudden resistance, or reinterpretation of previously accepted messages.
- Link social listening and field observations to programme adaptation cycles (see Tools 3 and 10).

Key reminder: Community feedback is not an interruption; it is part of the intervention. Listening, adjusting, and acting together builds trust and resilience.

TOOL 12

[Reflect-Act-Reflect Accountability Tool](#)

Reflect-Act-Reflect (R-A-R) as a Practice and Tool

In faith-based programming, sustained change requires not just action, but also reflection on what is being done, why, and how it aligns with shared values. The Reflect-Act-Reflect (R-A-R) model, introduced by RfP, is a simple but powerful cycle that helps individuals, groups, and institutions pause, reassess, and adapt with intention.

R-A-R is not a reporting requirement. It is a spiritual and practical discipline that strengthens ownership, responsiveness, and alignment with both programme goals and moral responsibilities. Faith leaders, MFACCs, youth groups, and programme teams can all use the R-A-R cycle to guide how they learn from and adapt their actions.

What it looks like in practice:

- **Reflect** – What has happened? What was the community response? What signs of shift or resistance have we noticed? What have we learned?
- **Act** – Based on reflection, what should we change, amplify, or stop doing? What is the next step that is grounded in both feedback and faith values?
- **Reflect (again)** – After acting, what shifted? Did we stay rooted in our values? What new insight do we now carry forward?

When to use it:

- At the end of a dialogue series, community event, or MFACC meeting
- After introducing a new tool or message
- During quarterly reviews or planning sessions
- Following a period of visible resistance, confusion, or backlash
- As a closing ritual in training or spiritual gatherings

Digital Monitoring and Engagement

Digital spaces, particularly WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and community radio, play a powerful role in shaping how harmful practices are justified, challenged, or misunderstood. Monitoring these spaces is not optional. It is essential to understand how norms are shifting in real time and how faith narratives are being shared, distorted, or resisted.

Digital engagement is also an opportunity. Faith leaders, youth influencers, and religious institutions can become powerful digital norm-setters, using their platforms to amplify protective messages, challenge harmful beliefs, and respond to emerging resistance.

Monitoring digital spaces helps programme teams:

- Detect misinformation and backlash early.
- Understand which messages are gaining traction.
- Adjust tone, framing, and messenger based on what resonates.

How to do it:

- Use Tool 11 – *Digital Advocacy and Myth-Busting Guide* to track content trends, hashtags, videos, and digital conversations related to harmful practices and faith.
- Train youth and media-savvy faith actors to serve as digital monitors, logging content that reinforces or challenges harmful norms.
- Combine online monitoring with offline insights, such

as linking sermon themes with WhatsApp reactions or community discussions.

- Use findings to adapt messages, flag misinformation, and develop creative responses (e.g., short videos, scripture-based audio clips, live Q&A sessions).

Link to Tools:

- [Tool 3: Social Listening Framework](#)
- [Tool 10: Digital Advocacy and Myth-Busting Guide](#)
- [Tool 6: People-Centred Approaches for Faith Engagement \(Prototyping Phase\)](#)

Sustaining What Lasts: Key Enablers, Challenges, and Actions

Several actions can be taken to support participatory MEAL and sustainable change. The table below describes a range of approaches to strengthen MEAL across different areas, describing common challenges and actions to counter those challenges through the tools in this guide.

Area	What Enables Sustainability	Common Challenges	What to Strengthen or Sustain	Linked Tools / Actions
Spiritual Legitimacy	Framing MEAL as a moral duty grounded in scripture (justice, protection, stewardship)	Disconnect between technical indicators and spiritual values; lack of theological engagement	Scriptural messaging in R-A-R cycles, faith-rooted feedback practices	TOOL 4 (Faith Messaging), TOOL 12 (R-A-R), FPCC MEAL Framework
Community Ownership	MFACCs and faith groups lead monitoring and feedback; local design of reflection formats	Top-down rollouts that ignore community concerns, the fear of speaking up	Faith-led forums, participatory feedback tools, interfaith learning spaces	TOOL 9 (MFACC Framework), TOOL 6 (People-Centred Approaches), TOOL 3 (Social Listening)
Digital Integration	Youth-led digital tracking, WhatsApp feedback, religious radio and livestreams	Low digital literacy, limited trust in digital feedback loops, and misinformation fatigue	Digital listening, social media engagement, myth-busting responses	TOOL 10 (Digital Advocacy), TOOL 3 (Social Listening), TOOL 6 (People-Centred Approaches)
Peer Learning	Sermon review groups, WhatsApp-based reflections, interfaith exchanges	Fragmented communication; reliance on one or two facilitators	Peer mentorship, regular MFACC review meetings, and scriptural reflections	TOOL 5 (Faith Leader Training), TOOL 9 (MFACC Framework)
Pushback Detection and Adaptation	Signs of resistance tracked in dialogue, sermons, digital posts	Resistance fatigue, denial, or delayed response; backlash seen too late	Pushback checklists, adaptive programming, and co-created re-messaging	Pushback Checklist, TOOL 6 (People-Centred Approaches), TOOL 2 (Legal Entry Points)
Institutional Embedding	Integration into seminary training, interfaith councils, or religious curricula	Over-reliance on individual champions; limited uptake at the institutional level	Faith council buy-in, declaration endorsements, seminary-led R-A-R	TOOL 1 (Influence Mapping), TOOL 10 (Policy Toolkit), FPCC Partnership Principles

Conclusion: The Power of Faith in Ending Harmful Practices

Faith leaders, religious institutions, and communities of belief are not on the sidelines of social change; they are at its heart. Their words shape worldviews. Their presence commands trust. And their values can anchor movements that protect, heal, and transform.

This guide shows that the path to ending harmful practices like female genital mutilation and child marriage must be led by those who hold moral authority and spiritual responsibility. When protection is preached from the pulpit, when dignity is affirmed through scripture, and when dialogue is rooted in both in heart and mind, change becomes not only possible, but it becomes lasting. Above all, this guide affirms that:

- 1. Faith engagement is essential** – Faith leaders are often the most trusted and influential actors in a child's life.
- 2. Change must be faith-led, community-driven, and locally owned** – Imported solutions fail; grounded ones endure.
- 3. Sustainability requires systems** – Embedding new norms into spiritual, social, and institutional structures ensures they hold.
- 4. Digital and peer platforms scale impact** – Sermons, stories, and advocacy travel far when shared in networks of trust.
- 5. Faith-led accountability builds trust** – Communities track commitments more when they are invited to lead and question.

Final Call to Action: What You Can Do Next

The impact of this guide depends on how faith leaders, organizations, and partners use it.

For Faith Leaders & Religious Institutions:

- Preach protection and compassion in every sermon.
- Publicly reject harmful practices and offer scriptural alternatives.

- Host listening forums with women, youth, and survivors.
- Share faith-based messages through social and digital platforms.

For Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) & MFACCs:

- Train and mentor faith leaders in theological reflection and child rights.
- Establish feedback circles and commitment-tracking tools.
- Promote gender- and intergenerational inclusion in all dialogues.
- Co-develop digital strategies to counter harmful messaging.

For UNICEF, Civil Society & Development Partners:

- Invest in faith-rooted strategies that go beyond messaging.
- Support theological reinterpretation efforts that centre protection.
- Equip faith actors to engage in national and regional policy platforms.
- Back digital storytelling and advocacy grounded in faith values.

Let This Be a Living Guide

This guide is not a blueprint. It is a starting point meant to be adapted, challenged, and enriched by the communities it serves. Use it as a mirror, a map, a conversation starter. Let it accompany you in mosques and churches, in tea circles and digital groups, in moments of resistance and of hope.

Together with faith, we can raise a generation free from harm. And with courage, we can ensure that protection becomes not only a policy but a shared purpose, embedded in both prayer and practice.

ANNEX: Tools

Among the 12 tools in this annex, Tool 5 is distinct. While other tools are designed for direct community use, Tool 5 is a facilitator resource that equips faith leaders to use the full toolkit. It can be delivered as a stand-alone training or integrated into programme phases.

The training modules in Tool 5:

- Prepare faith leaders to apply scripture, dialogue, and facilitation skills.

- Integrate activities from other tools (e.g., *Tool 4 on Scripture Cards*, *Tool 10 on Policy Advocacy*, *Tool 11 on Digital Advocacy*).

- Serve as the entry point for leaders who will then draw on the other tools with their communities.

For this reason, Tool 5 can be read both as part of Phase 2 (Design) and as a cross-cutting training guide.

NO.	Tool Name	Description	Phase(s)
1	Faith Actor Influence and Resistance Mapping Tool	Identifies power, trust, resistance, and engagement pathways within faith ecosystems.	Phase 1
2	Faith-Sensitive Legal Entry Points	Assesses alignment between theology, legal frameworks, and influence pathways to uphold rights and protect girls.	Phase 1
3	Social and Community Listening Tool	Tracks narratives, misinformation, and sentiment across sermons, radio, and digital platforms; also used for community reflection.	Phase 1 and Phase 4
4	Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards	Provides scripture-aligned messages and stories to challenge harmful norms and promote positive alternatives.	Phase 1
5	Faith Leader Training Guide (Facilitator Resource)	Modular training resource for faith leaders, including Mind-Heart Dialogue and safeguarding content.	Phase 2
6	People-Centred Approaches for Faith Engagement	Participatory co-design guide adapted for faith-based intervention planning and ownership.	Phase 2
7	Women's Empowerment & Faith Reflection Module	Supports gender-inclusive engagement by integrating women's empowerment and theological reflection.	Phase 2
8	Youth-Led Dialogue & Innovation Toolkit	Engages youth faith actors in dialogue, innovation, and peer-led awareness initiatives.	Phase 2
9	MFACC Coordination Framework	Provides a model for interfaith collaboration, mentoring, and scale-up of faith-based interventions.	Phase 3
10	Faith-Led Policy Advocacy Toolkit	Equips faith actors with strategies and materials for engaging in legal and policy advocacy aligned with faith values.	Phase 3
11	Digital Advocacy and Myth-Busting Guide	Guides the creation of digital campaigns and responses to harmful narratives and misinformation.	Phase 3
12	Reflect-Act-Reflect Accountability Tool	A participatory tool that supports regular community- and faith-led reflection, adaptation, and shared accountability. Facilitates feedback cycles rooted in moral responsibility and scripture.	Phase 3

Tool 1 - Faith actor influence and resistance mapping

Safeguarding, confidentiality, and privacy

Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights and safety of all participants, especially children and young people.

What this means for programme activities

Before activities

- Ensure venues are safe, private, and accessible.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple terms.
- Discuss confidentiality and clarify that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if individuals choose not to participate or to drop out at any point of the activity.
- Obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children, with parental consent where required. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place should individuals require support.

During activities

- Do not ask for personal or sensitive details in group settings.
- Encourage sharing of experiences as relevant, without naming those involved.
- If someone begins to disclose abuse or other traumatic experiences, listen respectfully, do not press for details and refer according to agreed pathways.
- Pause the activity if needed to protect participants.

After activities

- Keep notes anonymous and never include names or identifying details in reports.
- Store data securely and share only in general terms.
- If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately. If photos are taken ensure that faces and identifying details of survivors and children are hidden or obscured.

Part 1: Influence and trust-mapping

To identify the formal and informal faith actors who shape social norms, beliefs, and practices related to harmful practices (female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage), and to understand the nature of their influence, who trusts them and how they can be engaged in shifting harmful norms.

This mapping helps programmes assess:

- The level and form of influence each actor holds (spiritual, social, access capital).
- The breadth of their reach (local, regional, national).
- Their perceived credibility and trustworthiness.
- Which platforms they use to shape discourse (sermons, schools, radio, social media, rituals).
- How they have engaged in past initiatives around child protection and rights.

This step aligns with social and behavioural change (SBC) principles of identifying trusted community influencers and ensures programme entry points are based on trusted relationships and moral authority.

How to get this information

Use a mix of:

- Key informant interviews with women, youth, religious elders, traditional leaders and local leaders.
- Consultations with local faith-based organizations (FBOs) or national interfaith bodies (e.g., MFACCs, IRCs).
- Observation of faith-based programming, sermons or community gatherings where beliefs about FGM and marriage are expressed.

Listening well in Phase 1 means listening to people's fears, and to their faith.

Key concepts to consider

Capital type	Definition	Example
Spiritual capital	Ability to draw on sacred texts, rituals and theological authority to reframe harmful practices	Imam quoting the Qur'an to promote health-based arguments against FGM
Social capital	Networked influence that facilitates trust, cohesion and collective behaviour change	Pastor trusted by both women and youth in multiple congregations
Access capital	Gatekeeping role allowing entry to isolated or conservative communities	Faith elder in a pastoralist clan who provides programme access to girls and women

Faith actor mapping template

Use this template by interviewing key faith actors and traditional leaders for factual details (name/role, affiliation, platform of influence, etc.), and use community observation to determine relational aspects such as who trusts them and community perception.

Field	Guiding question	How to answer / Method
Name / role	Who is the faith actor? What is their formal or informal title or role?	Ask the individual directly
Religious affiliation	What denomination, sect or tradition do they belong to?	Ask the individual directly
Gender / Age	What is their gender and estimated age range?	Ask directly or estimate through observation if appropriate
Geographic scope	What is the range of their influence (village, district, national)?	Ask directly and confirm via community input
Platform of influence	Where and how do they influence? (e.g., sermons, women's groups, WhatsApp, TikTok, radio)	Ask the actor and validate through observation
Type of influence	Is it theological (beliefs), moral (behaviour), or social (status/gender norms)?	Assess through interview + community feedback
Who trusts them	Which groups listen to or follow them? (e.g., youth, women, elders, diaspora)	Ask community members; validate through mapping or focus group discussions (FGDs)
Community perception	How are they viewed? (trusted, polarizing, neutral, controversial)	Gather via community interviews or participatory mapping
Capital types (tick all)	☐ Spiritual ☐ Social ☐ Access	Tick based on triangulated info: interview + community insight
Role in past campaigns	Have they publicly supported or opposed any child protection efforts? What was the outcome?	Ask directly; review past engagement records if available
Notable quotes or positions	Have they publicly stated views on FGM or child marriage? Use quotes where possible.	Record from interviews, sermons, social media, public events

Tips for implementation

- Include minority and Indigenous faith actors even if they are not affiliated with official structures. These may hold influence in ritual practices or family decisions.
- Don't assume institutional hierarchy = community trust. Informal figures (e.g., women prayer leaders, clan elders) may be more trusted.
- Consider gendered dynamics: who leads in public versus who influences behind closed doors?

Part 2: Resistance typology

This is concerned with identifying the real drivers behind resistance expressed by faith actors and communities when faced with efforts to address harmful practices. It goes beyond identifying whether someone agrees or disagrees — it seeks to understand why, and what emotional, theological or sociopolitical concerns underlie the resistance.

By naming different forms of resistance and uncovering their root causes, we can tailor appropriate, non-confrontational engagement strategies.

This aligns with the 'Mind-Heart Dialogue' approach, which sees resistance as a window into fears, identity and values — not just opposition.

For Part 2, speak with those exhibiting or observing resistance (faith actors, community members, traditional leaders) using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to explore the reasons behind their resistance.

Common forms of resistance

Form of resistance	Description
Theological	Literal or misinterpreted scriptural beliefs (e.g., 'God requires circumcision', 'Islam promotes early-marriage').
Emotional / Identity-based	Rooted in trauma, pride or cultural survival; tied to identity (e.g., 'this is who we are', 'cutting made me strong').
Social / Normative	Fear of community backlash or exclusion if they reject the practice (e.g., fear of being labelled 'unfaithful' or 'westernized').
Political	Influenced by power dynamics, traditional leadership or national debates (e.g., framing anti-FGM laws as western imperialism).
Silencing / Avoidance	Avoiding the topic entirely due to discomfort, fear or lack of capacity to engage.

Guiding questions

These questions help uncover what kind of resistance is present and where entry points for transformation might exist.

Pose the following questions during one-on-one interviews or focus group discussions with those who show or witness resistance (e.g., hesitant faith leaders, community members, including traditional elders) to uncover the root causes and forms of their resistance.

Field	Guiding question	How to answer / Method
Actor / group	Who is expressing resistance or hesitation (individuals, groups, institutions)?	Ask community members, peer faith actors and/or observe group behaviours
Form of resistance	What type of resistance is it (see table above)?	Assess through interviews, listening sessions and observed narratives
Root belief / fear	What is the key fear, assumption, or narrative driving this resistance (e.g. 'uncut girls do not make good wives', 'God wants us to uphold this tradition')?	Ask in-depth questions; look for underlying patterns in responses
Basis	Is it rooted in misinformation, peer pressure, cultural attachment, trauma or belief?	Listen carefully during interviews; identify recurring logic
Emotional trigger	What personal or community emotion is being activated (shame, fear of rejection, grief, nostalgia)?	Emerge through testimonials or FGD reflections
Depth of resistance	How entrenched is this belief? (Scale: 1 = open to discuss, 5 = publicly hostile or leading opposition)	Use facilitator judgment based on all data sources
Best entry points	What approach is most likely to open dialogue? (e.g., reinterpreting scripture, peer dialogue, survivor testimonies, interfaith examples, child health framing)	Co-develop during team analysis; draw from insights in past programming

Sample table format

Actor / group	Form of resistance	Root belief / Fear	Basis (myth, pressure, belief)	Emotional trigger	Depth (1–5)	Entry points
Sheikh Musa (village imam)	Theological	'FGM is Sunna for purity'	Scriptural misreading	Fear of divine disobedience	4	Engage via peer imam from same sect; Hadith-based reinterpretation
Women's elders group	Identity-based	'Uncut girls are promiscuous'	Cultural tradition	Shame; fear of rejection by in-laws	5	Survivor-led dialogue, community theatre, testimonies from positive deviants (e.g. men who have married uncut women)
Local pastor (youth ministry)	Social	'I'll lose my congregation if I speak out'	Peer pressure	Loss of social status	3	Private mentoring, use of anonymous success cases from other pastors
District religious council	Political	'FGM ban is western pressure'	Legal framing as imperial	Cultural pride, resentment	4	Link to African faith initiatives, engage with the African Union

Practical tips for field use

- Use story-based probing: 'What do people say in sermons or homes?' to surface deeper narratives.
- Map 'who influences the influencers', some may resist publicly but privately be willing to explore change.
- Track over time: resistance is not static, it can soften with time, trust, or seeing real-life examples.

Part 3: Faith transformation readiness assessment

To assess which faith actors are most ready to become al-

lies and champions for change, based on their openness to dialogue, scriptural reinterpretation, personal connection to the issue, and trust among vulnerable groups (especially girls and survivors).

This readiness assessment builds on the insights from Influence Mapping (Part 1) and Resistance Typology (Part 2). It synthesizes those findings to determine where momentum exists for faith-led advocacy and norm change.

This step helps identify which faith actors can move from awareness to action, and how quickly.

Indicators of readiness

Readiness indicator	Description	How to assess
Openness to dialogue	Willingness to engage in honest discussion about harmful practices, even if uncomfortable.	Ask the actor + verify with peers/ community
Openness to scriptural review	Receptiveness to revisiting or reinterpreting faith texts with others (e.g. peers, scholars, women leaders).	Ask actor + observe dialogue history
Role model status	Perceived by others as a person of moral integrity and spiritual leadership.	Ask community members (especially. Young people, women)
Personal connection to the Issue	Has a direct or familial link to the consequences of harmful practices (e.g., survivor in family or change in view due to experience).	Ask directly or note from prior discussions
Trusted by vulnerable groups	Respected by girls, youth or survivors, people most affected by harmful practices.	Ask youth/women's groups or use mapping
Willingness to co-design solutions	Open to co-creating locally owned alternatives or advocacy approaches (e.g., alternative rites of passage, sermon framing).	Ask actor directly during sessions
Past engagement in protection work	Any history of involvement in community protection, health education, or norm-shifting efforts (formal or informal).	Check prior project records or ask NGO/FBO staff

Assessment table template

Fill in the assessment table by triangulating information from the various sources of part 1 and part 2; conduct interviews with the faith actor and their peers, hold group discussions with community members (including youth,

women, and traditional leaders for broader perspective), review past programme engagement data, and observe the actor's interactions to gauge overall readiness.

Faith actor	Open to dialogue	Scriptural review	Role model	Personal link	Trusted by girls/survivors	Willing to co-design	Past child protection engagement	Overall readiness (0-5)
Pastor Daniel	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	5
Imam Amina	Yes	Somewhat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	4
Elder M.	No	No	Somewhat	No	No	No	No	1
Youth Chaplain L.	Yes	Yes	Emerging	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4.5

Scoring guidance: Use a scale of 0-5 based on cumulative evidence. Actors scoring 4-5 are good candidates for deeper partnership or public champion roles.

Tips for implementation

- Don't rely only on formal positions, informal influencers may have higher trust and readiness.
- Look for subtle signs of openness, like curiosity, self-questioning, or prior collaboration with NGOs.
- Include input from women, youth, and survivors in assessing trust and openness.
- Use case studies or roleplays to surface hidden openness or hesitation.
- Don't assume formal status equals influence, many community-trusted figures operate informally.

Tool 2 - Faith-sensitive legal entry points

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy

Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights and safety of all participants, especially children and young people.

What this means for programme activities

Before activities

- Ensure venues are safe, private and accessible.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple terms.
- Discuss confidentiality and clarify that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if individuals choose not to participate or to drop out at any point of the activity.
- Obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children, with parental consent where required. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.

Ensure referral pathways are in place should individuals require support. During activities

- Do not ask for personal or sensitive details in group settings.
- Encourage sharing of experiences as relevant, without naming those involved.
- If someone begins to disclose abuse or other traumatic experiences, listen respectfully, do not press for details and refer according to agreed pathways.
- Pause the activity if needed to protect participants.

After activities

- Keep notes anonymous and never include names or identifying details in reports.
- Store data securely and share only in general terms.
- If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately.
- If photos are taken ensure that faces and identifying details of survivors and children are hidden or obscured.

This tool is designed to support programme teams and faith actors in identifying and leveraging legal entry points to advocate for the abandonment of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. It facilitates the mapping of statutory, religious and customary frameworks and identifies where faith teachings and legal protections align, not only in content but also in values.

By turning legal content into community-led advocacy messaging rooted in both law and faith, this tool helps actors move beyond compliance towards shared moral and legal action.

Why this matters: Many harmful practices persist not because laws are absent, but because they are poorly understood, perceived as foreign or appear to contradict faith. This tool helps align hearts and systems.

How to use this tool

This is not a desk review tool, it is a dialogue tool.

It should be used with a diverse group of 3 to 10 local actors, including:

- Faith leaders (senior and emerging, male and female, across traditions).
- Legal professionals (e.g., legal aid providers, local prosecutors, child protection officers).
- Traditional leaders and customary courts.
- Women and youth representatives.
- Community-based organizations including faith-based organizations (FBOs).

You don't need to include all listed actors in every session. Prioritize them based on:

- The specific goal of the session (e.g., legal clarity, theological alignment, mapping roles).

- Who holds influence over the issue locally (e.g., marriage officiants, customary decision makers, parents).
- Who brings lived experience (e.g., women, youth, survivors).
- Who may be critical to future action (e.g., local legal officers, faith councils).

If only limited time or trust is available, begin with smaller, trusted groups of 3 to 4 participants (e.g., just faith leaders or just legal actors) and bring others in gradually.

It works best in a co-design setting, such as:

- Faith–law dialogue sessions and focus group discussions.
- Advocacy planning workshops.
- Faith leader training.
- Community gatherings.

Tool structure overview

Section	Focus
1. Legal norms scan	Map what the law says (national, religious, customary) and where gaps exist
2. Theological mapping	Identify which legal principles can be reinforced by scripture or doctrine
3. Risk and opportunity dialogue	Identify perceptions of contradiction and myths that create resistance
4. Action planning	Link legal principles and faith messages to audiences, messengers and formats

Section 1: Legal norms scan

To jointly analyse national, regional and customary legal frameworks related to FGM and child marriage; identify religious rulings (fatwas, pastoral letters, etc.) that either reinforce or challenge child protection goals; and map the formal or informal roles faith actors play in justice processes.

This lays the groundwork for identifying areas of alignment, contradiction and potential advocacy between legal systems and religious institutions.

Who to involve:

- Legal actors (e.g., paralegals, legal aid centres, prosecutors, judicial officials).
- Religious leaders (Muslim and Christian clergy, female and male faith actors).
- Customary authorities (e.g., clan elders, religious courts)
- Women and youth groups with experience navigating legal systems.
- Child protection staff and FBO partners.

Whether to bring all these actors together or meet separately depends on local dynamics:

- If trust and collaboration already exist, a joint session may generate rich, multi-perspective dialogue.
- If tensions or power imbalances exist (e.g., between legal actors and traditional leaders), start with smaller, peer-

based sessions with 3 to 5 participants and use a phased approach to bring insights together.

Always ensure youth, women and underrepresented voices are included meaningfully and not just symbolically in whichever format you choose.

How to facilitate

1. Start by reviewing legal and religious documents together with the group. Break participants into small groups to read and discuss what laws (formal or informal) currently apply in their area. Invite them to mark contradictions, gaps or unclear messages. This includes:
 - National statutory laws.
 - Regional/international instruments (Maputo Protocol, Convention On The Rights Of The Child, etc.).
 - Customary practices and bylaws.
 - Religious texts, fatwas or ecclesiastical statements.
2. Capture actual application and enforcement challenges (e.g., ‘law exists, but not applied in rural areas’). Use real-life examples to prompt discussion. Ask: ‘Does this law apply here?’ ‘Do people know about it?’ ‘Is it enforced equally?’ Encourage participants to speak from experience.
3. Map the role of faith institutions in legal decision-making. Ask participants questions such as:

- Do religious leaders bless or officiate child marriages or FGM?
- Are religious leaders/traditional leaders involved in sanctioning families that do not conform to the practice (e.g. by not engaging with the family, or not attending family events?).
- Are they involved in dispute resolution or legal referrals?
- What happens in faith spaces when a girl or boy is harmed, who responds, and how? Are they involved in community courts or legal mobilization?

Legal mapping matrix

This matrix can be used in two ways: (1) as a framework to guide group discussion during the legal norms scan; or (2) as a synthesis tool after participants have shared their knowledge and experiences. Decide based on group and facilitator comfort; some will benefit from filling it in during dialogue, others afterward.

This matrix supports programme teams and faith actors to visibly compare the legal landscape surrounding harmful practices, while recognizing the overlap, contradiction or silence that often exists across statutory, religious and customary systems.

Rather than treating the law as a fixed point, this tool invites stakeholders to reflect on:

- What laws or rulings say about FGM and child marriage.
- How they are understood and applied in the community.
- Where religious teachings reinforce or contradict these frameworks.
- How faith institutions participate in formal or informal justice systems (e.g., officiating marriages, resolving disputes, issuing moral guidance).

This is both a technical and political exercise. Encourage honest discussion about the tensions between legal systems, community expectations and faith interpretations.

The matrix allows teams to:

- Identify entry points for advocacy where laws and religious values align.
- Flag risks where legal protections are undermined by informal norms.
- Plan engagements that bridge the legal-faith gap using trusted messengers and faith teachings.

Use colour-coding or 'yes / no / partial' in the matrix to help visualize alignment or conflict.

Legal level	Law / ruling / practice	Position on FGM	Position on child marriage	Enforcement or interpretation gaps	Religious ruling or text	Role of faith institutions
National law	Marriage Act, Anti-FGM Act	Prohibited, criminal offence	Marriage under 18 prohibited	Weak reporting, fear of backlash	Qur'an 2:195 (non-harm), Proverbs 31:8	Sermon advocacy, referrals to protection officers
Religious rulings	Fatwa (Somaliland), Church Council letters	FGM declared haram	Marriage requires consent/maturity	Local dissemination often lacking	Qur'an 4:6, Ephesians 5:25	Marriage officiation, moral gatekeeping
Customary law	Clan bylaws, initiation rites	FGM condoned as initiation	Marriage at puberty allowed	Overrules statutory law in practice	'It's tradition, not religion'	Elders as decision makers, local dispute resolution
Regional law	Maputo Protocol, CEDAW	Prohibits FGM	Prohibits underage marriage	Perceived as western; not translated	Faith framing on protection/justice (Micah 6:8, Qur'an 16:90)	Potential for interfaith advocacy coalitions
International	Convention On The Rights Of The Child, SDG commitments	Prohibit both FGM and child marriage	Prohibit both FGM and child marriage	Community unaware or hostile	Qur'an 95:4 (dignity), 1 Cor. 6:19 (body as sacred)	Faith leaders involved in child protection campaigns

Tips for facilitators

- Encourage participants to differentiate between official law and lived experience.
- Discuss how religion is invoked in informal justice systems (e.g., ‘God will judge’ used in place of formal rulings).
- Note where faith institutions are already acting as referral or justice providers, even if not formally recognised.
- Identify where rulings exist but are unknown or resisted at the local level; these become advocacy opportunities.

Section 2: Theological mapping dialogue

This is to explore how faith teachings across traditions support legal and social protection against harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage. This dialogue helps programme teams and religious actors identify shared values, such as non-harm, justice and consent, that can strengthen advocacy, messaging and norm change.

The process surfaces not only supportive scripture but also credible messengers and community-specific interpretations, allowing for culturally rooted and faith-affirming engagement.

Who to involve:

- Religious leaders (including women, youth and minority voices).
- Local theologians and religious scholars.
- Legal actors and child protection staff.
- Community-based organizations and survivor networks.
- Anthropologists or cultural facilitators (especially in Indigenous contexts).

You do not need all these actors in one session. Consider holding separate sessions (e.g., youth only, or women faith leaders), then bringing findings together. Prioritize those who can speak to both scripture and lived realities, and ensure inclusion of lesser-heard voices. Have at least three participants in each session.

How to facilitate

1. Begin by reviewing key legal principles that promote child protection (e.g., age of consent, bodily integrity). This can be done either before the session (as preparation) or together with participants as a warm-up activity. Ask: ‘What laws or principles protect children in our context? What are they based on?’ Record responses visibly.

2. Invite participants to identify faith values or verses that support these same principles. (Tip: Also include traditional or Indigenous values and proverbs that promote justice or protection. These can complement religious teachings and help reach participants whose identity is more cultural than religious.)
3. Explore where those interpretations are already used locally and where harmful misreadings persist. Don’t assume all participants agree certain interpretations are harmful. Ask reflective questions like: ‘How is this verse usually taught here?’; ‘What are different ways this could be understood?’; ‘Are there teachings that may unintentionally lead to harm?’. Use peer-led dialogue and theological questioning rather than debate.
4. Discuss who is trusted to speak about these values, and how they can be mobilized.

This is not a theological debate. It is a space to co-locate the moral and legal case for protection in a language that communities trust and understand.

Theological mapping table

This tool assumes the group is somewhat open to exploring protective interpretations of scripture. If not, begin with more general values such as protection, compassion and justice, and gradually work towards scripture-based dialogue. Avoid framing verses as ‘wrong’; instead, foster shared reflection using open-ended prompts. If resistance is strong, you may first use tools such as the mind-heart dialogue methodology or the resistance typology in Tool 1 to build trust and identify emotional or identity-based barriers. You can also use Tool 6 (*human-centred design guide*) to co-create protective framing with community members before introducing religious texts.

Using scripture to reinforce legal protection against FGM and child marriage, this table helps participants match protective legal principles with:

- Scriptural or doctrinal references from different traditions.
- Faith-based values already known in the community.
- Trusted messengers able to carry the message.
- Localized applications that reflect lived realities.

Use this tool during co-design workshops or faith-law dialogue sessions.

Points to raise in dialogue

- Where are scriptures already used to promote protective messages?
- Which verses are frequently misused to justify harm?
- Who are the respected voices capable of conveying these protective teachings?
- Are there differences across generations, genders or denominations that need to be considered?

Legal principle / protection goal	Faith-based value	Scripture or religious text	Local interpretation or ruling	Trusted messenger / platform	Local application / message
Age of consent (18+)	Marriage requires maturity and choice	Qur'an 4:6 (sound judgment); Ephesians 5:25 (love and responsibility)	Fatwas and church bylaws in Mali, Uganda support age 18+	Youth pastor; madrasa teacher; women's faith group	'Marriage is not just age; it's maturity, readiness and dignity.'
Bodily integrity	The body is sacred and must not be harmed	1 Cor. 6:19 ("Your body is a temple"); Qur'an 2:195 ("Do not destroy yourselves")	Fatwas from Al-Azhar, Gambia, Somalia declare FGM haram	Female imam-nurse team; radio shows	'FGM has no place in our faith. The body is divine and must be protected.'
Protection of children	Duty to defend the vulnerable	Proverbs 31:8; Qur'an 16:90 (justice and compassion)	Referenced in Friday sermons and Christian youth fellowships	Interfaith youth councils; survivor-led dialogue	'God commands us to protect, not endanger, our daughters.'
Gender equality and dignity	Equal dignity of women and men	Genesis 1:27; Qur'an 95:4	Promoted by women faith leaders across East Africa	Women clerics; joint prayer gatherings	'Girls reflect the image of God; they deserve full protection.'

Tips for facilitators

- Use matched verse cards across religious traditions to highlight shared moral ground. Matched verse cards are pre-prepared examples of protective verses from different religions (e.g., one Christian and one Muslim verse about the body being sacred). Use them in pairs to show shared values across traditions and spark dialogue.
- Invite younger religious leaders to reflect on generational shifts in belief and messaging.
- Validate local beliefs where they protect girls, but respectfully challenge distortions.
- If possible, co-create sample sermons or advocacy messages during the session.

Section 3: Risk and opportunity dialogue

This focuses on identifying perceived or actual tensions between legal frameworks and religious or customary norms, and to explore the myths, power dynamics and

emotional triggers that can either block or enable alignment between the two.

This section enables programme teams and faith actors to anticipate resistance, clarify confusion and identify strategic openings for coordinated legal-faith engagement. It supports both risk mitigation and values-based advocacy.

Who to involve:

- Religious leaders from diverse denominations.
- Legal actors (especially those with child protection roles).
- Customary or clan-based justice leaders.
- Community influencers (including women, youth and elders).
- Social and behaviour change staff and norm change facilitators.

These dialogues work best in homogeneous groups first (e.g., religious leaders alone), then in mixed groups. This helps create psychological safety before exploring tensions across stakeholders. Ensure you have at least three participants in a group.

How to facilitate

- Begin with a summary of findings from Sections 1 and 2.
- Invite discussion around where people feel tension, fear or confusion about legal-faith relations.
- Use real-life case examples (e.g., a girl removed from early-marriage, an imam prosecuted under the FGM Act) to prompt discussion.
- Frame myths as collective misunderstandings, not individual ignorance.

What to look for

- Who feels most threatened by legal enforcement and why?
- What beliefs or power structures protect harmful practices?
- Where are people already questioning old norms and who is helping them do so?
- Which platforms (mosques, churches, councils) offer trusted space to introduce clarity and change?

Make it safe to express discomfort and perceived contradictions. Listening to confusion and fear is the entry point for building trust.

Dialogue table: Tensions and openings

This table helps participants systematically identify where tension exists between legal frameworks and religious or customary beliefs, and just as importantly, where openings for engagement and alignment can be found.

For each issue (such as FGM, child marriage, or reporting abuse), the table invites reflection on:

- What is perceived to contradict faith or tradition.
- What misinformation or misinterpretation is fuelling resistance.
- What power structures benefit from the status quo.
- What faith-based values or rulings can challenge or correct this.
- What practical entry points exist for dialogue, messaging or reform.

The goal is not to resolve all contradictions in one session, but to surface what's blocking progress and where faith can act as a bridge. Use this table as a group discussion tool. First, share findings from Sections 1 & 2. Then ask participants to name where contradictions or confusion persist. Capture these directly into the table on a flipchart or projector.

Issue	Perceived contradiction or concern	Myth or misinterpretation	Power or political dynamics	Faith-based opportunity	Suggested entry point
Marriage age	'Law says 18, but religion allows at puberty'	'Islam requires early-marriage'	Clan leaders fear loss of control	Qur'an 4:6 on maturity	Youth imam sermon; women elders' dialogue
FGM	'Law bans it but faith allows it for purity'	'Virgin Mary was cut' 'It's Sunna'	Elders feel sidelined by legal reforms	Fatwas declaring FGM haram	Peer imam messaging + health framing
Reporting violations	'Reporting is betrayal'	'Only God can judge marriage'	Customary justice undervalues formal courts	Proverbs 31:8; Qur'an 16:90	Engage faith courts to refer severe cases
International frameworks	'United Nations is anti-religion'	'Convention On The Rights Of The Child and Maputo are western tools'	Politicization of faith/rights discourse	Faith teachings on justice, mercy	Frame as shared values, not external pressure

Tips for facilitators

- Frame legal protections as ethical and spiritual obligations, not just compliance tools.
- Highlight local precedents where faith actors already supported law enforcement (e.g., fatwa against FGM in Somaliland).
- Emphasize the difference between religious teachings and social norms masquerading as religion.
- Consider gendered dimensions of resistance; who benefits or loses power when practices change?

Section 4: From mapping to action – Using legal and theological insights in dialogue

Legal and theological mapping is only useful if it shapes real conversations, interventions and advocacy. The goal is not to accumulate documents, but to unlock dialogue. This section helps translate legal and religious analysis into engagement strategies, co-designed messages and policy entry points.

Dialogue table: Tensions and openings

This table prompts programme teams and faith actors to jointly reflect on how legal frameworks, religious rulings and customary norms intersect and sometimes clash. By openly naming tensions, teams can pre-empt resistance and co-create messages or advocacy actions that build bridges rather than provoke backlash.

This table is best completed after the previous dialogue exercises. Use it to help the group agree on 1–2 priority tensions they want to address, and brainstorm how to re-frame them through dialogue, messengers or storytelling.

Legal/Religious issue (examples)	Key point of tension	Entry point for dialogue	Suggested framing or messenger
National age of marriage versus traditional customs	Families prefer earlier marriage for purity and protection	Many community members agree marriage should follow maturity	'Maturity' and 'consent' are also Qur'anic principles (4:6); engage female faith leader or midwife
FGM criminalization versus scriptural interpretations	Some religious leaders consider FGM a religious obligation	Qur'an does not mention FGM; Hadith vary in interpretation	Use intra-faith dialogue; frame as health and protection issue

Tool 3 - Social listening

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy

Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights and safety of all participants, especially children and young people.

What this means for programme activities

Before activities

- Ensure venues are safe, private and accessible.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple terms.
- Discuss confidentiality and clarify that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if individuals choose not to participate or to drop out at any point of the activity.
- Obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children, with parental consent where required. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place should individuals require support.

During activities

- Do not ask for personal or sensitive details in group settings.
- Encourage sharing of experiences as relevant, without naming those involved.
- If someone begins to disclose abuse or other traumatic experiences, listen respectfully, but do not press for details and refer according to agreed pathways.
- Pause the activity if needed to protect participants.

After activities

- Keep notes anonymous and never include names or identifying details in reports.
- Store data securely and share only in general terms.
- If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately.
- If photos are taken ensure that faces and identifying details of survivors and children are hidden or obscured.

Listening to what faith communities are saying and not saying about harmful practices

Many people rely on faith, scripture, and spiritual authority to make decisions about practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. These conversations happen in prayer groups, sermons, radio shows, social media and family gatherings. But most social listening tools don't capture them; they focus on news, public forums or government messaging. That means we miss what really shapes norms in many communities.

This tool helps fill that gap. It draws on [UNICEF's Social and Community Listening \(SCL\)](#) approach, which is a way of tracking what communities are saying and feeling about harmful practices through everyday conversations, media and local dialogues. It also utilizes behavioural insights to explore how faith, emotions and social norms influence choices in simple and effective ways.

Here, these ideas are adapted into easy, discussion-based activities that any facilitator can use. The goal is not to produce reports or large data sets, but to create safe spaces where faith leaders, women, youth and survivors can listen, reflect and act on what matters most in their communities.

This tool helps you to:

- Capture insights about what community members are saying about harmful practices and faith/religion.
- Include faith voices in your social listening, not just health or rights perspectives.
- Spot patterns: What verses, teachings or spiritual ideas are used to support or resist harmful practices?
- Find confusion or contradiction: Where are people getting mixed messages about what faith says?
- Identify change-makers: Which faith leaders or groups are already speaking out or offering alternatives?
- Use findings to act: Turn insights into better messages, stronger partnerships and more locally grounded change.
- Track shifts in attitudes; are the conversations in faith spaces changing? And if so, how are they changing?

This tool can be used on its own or added to your existing programme activities, like focus group discussions, baseline assessments or faith leader trainings. It works best when listening is ongoing, not just a one-off event.

Not all important conversations happen in public. When it comes to FGM or child marriage, many of the most powerful messages are shared in trusted faith spaces, sometimes formally (like in sermons), but often in private or informal ways (like prayer groups, WhatsApp chats or household conversations).

Step 1: Clarify what you're listening for

Build on your influence and resistance mapping to focus listening efforts.

Before you start listening, it helps to know what you're listening for, especially when working in faith spaces where language can be layered, coded or emotional. This step builds on what you already mapped in Tool 1, such as who holds influence, who resists change and what values or beliefs shape their positions.

Your goal here is to turn that mapping into a set of listening priorities, focused on the kinds of messages and emotional responses that keep harmful practices going or open the door to change.

Key themes to listen for (building on Tool 2):

Theme	What to listen for	Links to Tool 2
Faith-based justifications	Quotes from scripture, Hadith, sermons or sayings used to support or question harmful practices	Resistance framed as moral obligation, scriptural command, community honour
Emotional narratives	Shame, pride, fear, guilt, purity, honour, sin, salvation	Tool 1 highlights emotional resistance; this step identifies the words that express it
Silence or avoidance	Topics that are skipped or spoken about indirectly (e.g., girls' bodies, consent)	Signs of discomfort, taboo or unacknowledged tension
Signs of readiness or softening	Moments where leaders change tone, question tradition or open a door for dialogue	Reflects transformation readiness from Tool 1
Trusted messengers and their tone	How people react to different faith actors, what tone works, who is heard or ignored	Helps refine engagement strategy in later tools

This is not just about the content of messages; it's about tone, emotion, context and influence. What's being reinforced? What's being questioned? And how do people react?

Step 2: Choose where and how you will listen

This step helps you choose where to focus your listening and what methods to use, based on your context and capacity.

Types of faith-linked listening spaces

Type of space	Examples	What you might hear
Public religious platforms	Friday <i>khutbas</i> , ¹ Sunday sermons, church radio shows, faith radio stations	Explicit references to scripture, calls to uphold tradition, support or rejection of FGM/child marriage
Small group faith gatherings	Prayer groups, madrasa classes, Bible study groups, women's faith circles	Peer reinforcement of norms, emotional stories, silent agreement or quiet questioning
Faith-linked online spaces	WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, YouTube channels of local religious figures	Reposts of religious content, misinformation, anonymous pushback, emerging debates
Family or household settings	Faith advice shared by elders, marriage planning conversations	Sayings like "God wants girls to be clean" or "We've always done it this way"
Faith actor networks	Interfaith councils, youth fellowship groups, WhatsApp networks of pastors/imams	Discussion of community backlash, scripture interpretations, readiness for change

Choosing the right methods

Listening method	Use when you want To...	How to Do It
Participant observation	Understand tone, emotion and influence in sermons or group prayers	Attend a few sessions; take field notes on messaging and responses
Peer listening or diaries	Hear what youth or women say in private settings	Ask trusted community members to note down key messages they hear over a few weeks
Social media scanning	Pick up public or semi-private religious content online	Use manual scanning or tools like Talkwalker/brandwatch (if accessible); watch trends and reactions
Faith leader interviews	Explore what they say publicly versus their private comments	Use short informal interviews to ask: "What do people ask you? What's hard to speak about?"
Listening integrated into FGDs/KIIs	Add questions about what people hear from faith actors	Include 1–2 prompts like "What do your religious leaders say about girls and marriage?"

The more trusted and familiar you are to the space, the deeper your listening will go. If possible, work with community insiders (e.g. youth group leaders, female pastors, madrasa teachers) as listening partners.

Tips for ethical and respectful listening

- Be clear about why you're listening and how insights will be used.
- Don't record or quote, instead, paraphrase main themes, discourses and narratives.

- Respect the boundaries of sacred spaces; if unsure, ask a faith actor to guide you.
- Include diverse spaces: men's, women's, youth, interfaith, and minority faith groups.
- Don't assume silence means consent; people may be afraid to speak.

"When we listen with respect to faith, we don't weaken our message, we strengthen our connection."
Faith leader, Zambia

¹ Formal Islamic sermons or speeches delivered in mosques, most prominently before the congregational Friday prayer (Jumu'ah) and during major Islamic festivals (Eids).

Listening preparation sheet

Use these prompts before entering a faith space (sermon, group, online forum).

Prompt	Notes
What theme(s) am I focusing on? (e.g., purity, obedience, maturity)	
What resistance patterns were mapped in Tool 1 that I might hear/listen out for?	
Which actors or platforms am I observing today?	
What tone or emotional response should I be alert to?	
What scripture, quotes or sayings might come up?	

Step 3: Capture and analyse what you hear

Make sense of the patterns, language and emotions coming from faith spaces

Now that you've identified what to listen for and where to listen, the next step is to document and analyse what you're hearing, not just the words, but the tone, context

and the underlying emotions. This step helps turn informal messages from sermons, prayer groups, social media or interviews into clear insights you can use in your programming.

What to capture

Try to note the following from each listening activity (whether online or offline):

What to capture	Examples
Key messages or quotes	'The Bible says a woman must obey' / 'Islam forbids harming the body'
Who said it and in what setting	Female sheikh in women's group / young pastor on TikTok / elder in funeral sermon
Tone and emotional cues	Was it angry? Sad? Said as a joke? Whispered? Proud?
Audience reaction	Nodding, silence, clapping, walking out, debate afterwards
Signals of change or resistance	'He never used to say that before' / 'The young people challenged her'
Scriptural or traditional references	Specific Qur'an verse, Bible story or proverb used to justify a point

If needed, use short field notes, quotes or screenshots. You don't need transcripts; just capture the essence.

Faith-responsive listening note sheet

Use during or after listening in faith-linked spaces (sermons, WhatsApp, prayer circles, etc.)

Field	Entry
Date & location / Platform	
Type of space (sermon, group, online, household)	
Key message heard (verbatim if possible for internal reflections, not for wider circulation)	
Faith reference or religious framing	
Emotional tone (e.g., shame, pride, fear)	
Audience reaction (e.g., silence, agreement, laughter)	
Link to influence/Resistance (Tool 2)	
Signs of readiness or change?	

How to analyse what you're hearing

Group your observations into a few categories to make sense of them. below is one example adapted from UNICEF's behavioural insights approach:

Category	What to look for
Narratives	What stories are being told about women, purity, family honour, sin or salvation?
Norms	What do people say others expect them to do? What would happen if they didn't do what others expect of them?
Messengers	Who is influencing others, directly or indirectly? Who do people trust or ignore?
Contradictions	Where do people express confusion, conflict or mixed messages about faith versus law or culture?
Change agents	Are there individuals or groups offering new messages that are gaining traction?

Tips for low-resource listening

- Use a simple template (Word, Excel, notebook) to organize notes weekly.
- Review them in small team debriefs or with youth/religious partners.
- Look for repeated words, patterns, tone shifts, or moments where someone challenges the norm.
- Consider working with a local faith actor or social and behaviour change focal point to interpret what you're seeing.

Step 4: Use what you've heard to shape your response

Social listening only becomes meaningful if we use what we learn to adjust how we engage, message and partner with faith actors and communities. This step helps you take what you've heard and translate it into concrete programme decisions, especially in Phases 2 and 3 of this guide (Co-Design and Implementation).

Use insights to adjust your approach

Insight type	How to use it	Example
Strong resistance from specific leaders	Reconsider how and when to engage them	Delay public messaging; invest in 1-on-1 engagement first
Conflicting messages across faith platforms	Clarify and unify key protective messages	Develop sermon guides or talking points through interfaith platforms
Misquoted scripture or myths in circulation	Address in SBC materials and interactions with faith leader input	Co-create WhatsApp audio messages correcting common myths
Emerging supportive voices	Amplify through peer sharing or local radio Engage actively with supportive voices as allies	Spotlight female pastors or young imams already promoting change
Emotional tone (fear, pride, shame)	Match messages to emotional drivers	Frame protection as pride and strength, not shame or betrayal

Practical outputs you can develop

Use your listening findings to shape tools and actions across your programme:

- Tailored Messaging – faith-informed sermon guides, short radio spots, story-based videos or prayer circle reflections.
- Engagement Planning – who to partner with and how (see your faith transformation readiness matrix).
- Risk management – anticipate backlash or misinterpretation and build in local support strategies.
- Monitoring shifts – return to the same faith spaces after 3–6 months to see what’s changing (or not).

Where this links in the programme guide

- Phase 1: Adds depth to the faith actor mapping tool by showing not just who is influential, but what they’re saying and how they’re heard.
- Phase 2: Strengthens the co-design of interventions (Tool 2.2) and faith messaging toolkit (Tool 2.3) by rooting them in real discourse.
- Phase 3: Informs implementation and tracking, including messaging rollouts, community dialogues, and the commitment tracker.

Make listening a regular practice; not a one-time exercise. When faith actors see that their words are heard and shape action, trust grows.

Step 5: Track shifts, monitor faith discourse

Keep listening over time, beliefs change slowly, but visibly

Beliefs and social norms don't change overnight. This step reminds us to go back and listen again to the same groups or leaders and see what has shifted, stayed the same or evolved in unexpected ways.

What to track	How to track It
Changes in messaging from faith leaders	Revisit sermons or group sessions; compare quotes over time
Shifts in emotional tone	Are messages more open, defensive, proud or fearful?
New or rising messengers	Are more youth, women or mid-level leaders speaking out?
Reactions to interventions	How did people respond to co-designed materials or campaigns?
Uptake of faith-aligned messages	Are messages you co-developed now being repeated or adapted locally?

Suggested approach:

- Set a review period (e.g. every 3 or 6 months).
- Use the same template from Step 3 to compare previous findings.
- Share back with faith leaders: "Here's what we're hearing now; what does it mean to you?"

- Link into existing monitoring and learning systems where possible.

Faith discourse tracking log

Below is an example of a filled template to help you revisit sites and track change (monthly or quarterly).

Date	Space / actor	Topic / message	Change observed?	Still resistant?	Notes
Mar 2025	Women's prayer circle	FGM called 'a mother's duty'	No shift	Yes	Still a dominant message
May 2025	Same group	Mentioned health risks, silence after	Some hesitation	Yes, but signs of opening	Consider engaging health-faith team

TOOL 4: Faith messaging and scripture cards

This tool equips faith leaders, facilitators, and community influencers with scripture-based resources to begin difficult conversations about harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. Rather than relying on general messaging or external arguments, it grounds the dialogue in Christian and Muslim texts, inter-faith values and faith-framed storytelling.

This tool provides:

- Adaptable faith messages for sermons, group discussions or media.
- Paired scripture cards to prompt values-based dialogue.
- Information sheets to clarify religious misconceptions about FGM and child marriage.

The aim is to support faith leaders in speaking with confidence, correcting harmful misinterpretations and guiding communities towards practices that reflect the core values of justice, protection and dignity.

Section A: Faith messaging guide

Faith-framed reflections on harmful practices, grounded in scripture and moral values.

Theme 1: Our faith protects the body

Christian scriptures:

- "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- "So God created humankind in his image..." (Genesis 1:27).
- "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." (Psalm 139:14).

Muslim scriptures:

- "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm." (Hadith – Ibn Majah).
- "We have certainly honoured the children of Adam..." (Qur'an 17:70).
- "Do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction." (Qur'an 2:195).

Suggested faith message:

Our sacred texts are clear: the human body is a divine trust. It is not ours to damage or mark with pain.

A girl is not born to be cut. She is born to be honoured, her body whole, her spirit strong.

Any practice that leaves scars, physical or emotional, is not of God. It is culture, not scripture.

Let us return to faith that protects, not wounds.

Theme 2: Marriage requires consent and maturity

Christian scriptures:

- "Love is patient... it does not insist on its own way." (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).
- "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25).
- "Let marriage be held in honour among all..." (Hebrews 13:4).

Muslim scriptures:

- "Marriage is only valid with mutual consent." (Hadith – Ibn Majah).
- "Test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage; if you find them sound in judgment, release their property to them." (Qur'an 4:6).
- "And do not marry them against their will." (Qur'an 4:19).

Suggested faith message:

Consent is not a western idea; in Islam and Christianity alike is it recognized in our scriptures. No one should marry without full understanding, readiness and choice.

Maturity means more than age; it means knowledge, safety, emotional strength.

A girl too young to make her own decisions cannot yet be a wife.

Faith protects women. It does not rush them into adulthood.

Theme 3: Speaking for the vulnerable is a moral duty

Christian scriptures:

- "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves... defend the rights of the poor and needy." (Proverbs 31:8–9).
- "Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Psalm 82:4).
- "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." (Psalm 9:9).

Muslim scriptures:

- "Whoever sees evil, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then with his heart." (Hadith – Sahih Muslim).
- "Stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to Allah, even against yourselves or your parents or your kin." (Qur'an 4:135).
- "Help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and aggression." (Qur'an 5:2).

Suggested faith message:

Silence in the face of harm is not neutrality, it is complicity. Our faiths call us not to be passive observers but active protectors.

When a girl is cut, when a child is married, we are all called to speak out; to bring truth into tradition.

This is not rebellion. This is righteousness.

Section B: Scripture pairing and dialogue cards

Each of the statements and dialogue prompts below represents a reflection point, they can be written on an individual card/piece of paper to guide reflection and discussion. Use in group discussions, faith leader training, interfaith circles or poster content. Encourage reflection, not debate.

Value: human dignity

Christian scripture:

- “So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them.” (Genesis 1:27).
- “You knit me together in my mother’s womb... I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:13–14).

Muslim scripture:

- “We have certainly honoured the children of Adam...” (Qur’an 17:70).
- “And indeed, We created man in the best of stature.” (Qur’an 95:4).

Dialogue prompt:

- What does it mean to say that every girl is created in God’s image and honoured by God?
- How do our current practices reflect or violate this dignity?

Value: Non-harm / protection

Christian scripture:

- “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... therefore, honour God with your bodies.” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).
- “Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law.” (Romans 13:10).

Muslim scripture:

- “There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm.” (Hadith – Ibn Majah).
- “Do not throw yourselves into destruction with your own hands.” (Qur’an 2:195).
- “Do not kill your children out of poverty; We provide.

Dialogue prompt:

- What are the consequences of our acts which we do in the name of culture or misunderstood religion? Are we protection or causing harm?
- What teachings do our faiths give us to protect rather than wound?

Value: Consent and maturity in marriage

Christian scripture:

- “Love is patient... it does not insist on its own way.” (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).
- “Let marriage be held in honour among all.” (Hebrews 13:4).

Muslim scripture:

- “Marriage is only valid with mutual consent.” (Hadith – Ibn Majah).
- “Do not inherit women against their will.” (Qur’an 4:19).
- “Test the orphans until they reach marriageable age... if you find them sound in judgment...” (Qur’an 4:6).

Dialogue prompt:

- At what point can someone truly give consent in the eyes of faith?
- How does our community define maturity and does it align with scripture?
- What does this look like in our community and what needs to change to ensure that children are protected?

Value: Justice and accountability

Christian scripture:

- “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves... defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:8–9).
- “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24).

Muslim scripture:

- “Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even against yourselves...” (Qur’an 4:135).
- “Help one another in righteousness and piety...” (Qur’an 5:2).

Dialogue prompt:

- What does it mean to “stand for justice” even when it challenges tradition or family?
- What examples exist in our community of this?
- How can faith leaders support one another in upholding these values?

Optional use

You can print these cards on laminated paper, use them in pair-sharing, small groups or as sermon planning tools.

They also work as visual prompts in dialogue spaces (e.g., pasted on walls or used as entry questions).

Section C: Religious misconceptions – information sheets

Clarifying faith-based misinterpretations that enable harmful practices.

Misconception 1: Islam requires FGM

What Islamic doctrine teaches:

- The Qur'an contains no verse that mandates or even suggests FGM.
- The hadith sometimes cited to justify the practice is classified as weak (da'if) and lacks legal weight across all four Sunni schools.
- Foundational Islamic principles, such as rahma (mercy), karama (dignity), and amanah (trust), demand that harm to the human body be avoided.
- The legal maxim la darar wa la dirar ("no harm, no reciprocating harm") is consistently cited by jurists to invalidate any harmful practice.

Relevant scripture and teachings:

- "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm." (Hadith – Ibn Majah).
- "Do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction." (Qur'an 2:195).
- "We have certainly honoured the children of Adam." (Qur'an 17:70).

Statements from Islamic authorities:

- Al-Azhar Supreme Council (2007): FGM has no basis in sharia and must be prohibited for health and moral reasons.
- The Grand Mufti of Egypt: FGM is harmful, unsupported by Qur'anic teaching and should end.
- Morocco Council of Ulema: FGM is cultural, not Islamic and contradicts Islam's protective ethic.

Clarification: FGM is a cultural practice with no foundation in Islamic theology. Islam prohibits physical and emotional harm, particularly to children.

Misconception 2: Christianity permits or endorses child marriage

What Christian teaching affirms:

- The Bible does not prescribe child marriage. Descriptions of early-marriage in ancient contexts reflect historical, not doctrinal, norms.
- Christian marriage theology centres on mutuality, love and sacrificial partnership; values that imply full consent and emotional maturity.

- Many churches have explicitly condemned child marriage and recognize it as incompatible with Christian ethics of care and justice.

Relevant scripture and teachings:

- "Love is patient... it does not insist on its own way." (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).
- "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church..." (Ephesians 5:25).
- "Let marriage be held in honour among all." (Hebrews 13:4).

Statements from Christian leaders:

- World Council of Churches: Child marriage is a denial of the dignity God grants each child.
- African Church Leaders Declaration (2015): No girl should be married before she is emotionally, physically and spiritually ready.

Clarification: Child marriage is a product of poverty, patriarchy and social control; not scripture. Christianity upholds love, readiness and justice in marital relationships.

Misconception 3: These practices are tradition, not harm

What faith ethics require:

- Tradition is not inherently sacred. It must be continually tested against scriptural imperatives for justice, protection and human dignity.
- Harmful practices passed down through generations must be openly questioned, especially when they impact children, girls and women, who tend to be the most vulnerable in our societies.
- Faith demands moral courage to reform cultural norms that no longer serve the good.

Relevant scripture and teachings:

- "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition." (Matthew 15:6).
- "When it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed,' they say, 'We will follow what we found our forefathers doing.'" (Qur'an 2:170).

Moral questions for faith leaders:

- Does the practice protect the child or expose him/her to harm?
- Are we defending God's command or simply preserving custom?
- Are we honouring our daughters / our children or silencing them?

Clarification: Tradition must not be confused with divine will. Authentic religious practice aligns with compassion, protection and moral accountability.

TOOL 5 - Faith leader training guide (facilitator resource)

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy

Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights and safety of all participants, especially children and young people.

What this means for programme activities

Before activities

- Ensure venues are safe, private and accessible.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple terms.
- Discuss confidentiality and clarify that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if individuals choose not to participate or to drop out at any point of the activity.
- Obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children, with parental consent where required. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place should individuals require support.

During activities

- Do not ask for personal or sensitive details in group settings.
- Encourage sharing of experiences as relevant, without naming those involved.
- If someone begins to disclose abuse or other traumatic experiences, listen respectfully, do not press for details and refer according to agreed pathways.
- Pause the activity if needed to protect participants.

After activities

- Keep notes anonymous and never include names or identifying details in reports.
- Store data securely and share only in general terms.
- If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately.
- If photos are taken ensure that faces and identifying details of survivors and children are hidden or obscured.

This tool is distinct from others in the annex. While most tools are designed for direct use with communities, Tool 5 is a facilitator training manual that equips faith leaders to use the full toolkit. It can be delivered as a stand-alone workshop, integrated into ongoing trainings or adapted into shorter modules.

The training guide strengthens leaders' theological fluency, dialogue skills and capacity to address harmful practices. It also draws on other tools in this guide, for example, using Scripture and Messaging Cards (Tool 4), integrating myth-busting activities (Tool 11), and preparing leaders for policy advocacy (Tool 10) and community mobilization and accountability (Tools 9 and 12).

In this way, this tool (Tool 5) functions both as a stand-alone training package and as a gateway into the wider toolkit, ensuring that faith leaders are equipped not only with knowledge but also with practical methods to engage their communities, link with institutions and sustain change.

This training manual complements the [2021 Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities \(FPCC\) Programme Guidance](#), by introducing content focusing on harmful practices. It is designed to deepen and extend that foundational work by equipping faith leaders to respond specifically to female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, which are practices that persist across many communities and are often misunderstood as religiously sanctioned.

Objectives

- Build theological fluency on protection, dignity, consent and well-being.
- Address theological misunderstandings that justify harmful practices.
- Strengthen skills in dialogue, empathy and community mobilization.
- Prepare leaders to engage in policy and digital spaces
- Provide faith-sensitive training that is inclusive, participatory and adaptable.

Who it is for

- Senior and grass roots religious leaders (imams, pastors, elders).
- Women and youth leaders within religious institutions.
- Interfaith council members and representatives from Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees (MFACC).
- Facilitators supporting FPCC-aligned faith engagement.
- Faith-based organizations and other faith actors.

Structure of the tool

This tool is made up of five core modules that can be delivered as a full workshop (2–3 days), or used selectively depending on your goals, time and participants. Each module includes:

- A learning objective.
- Suggested timing and audience.
- Sample activities and discussion prompts.
- Facilitation notes to help guide conversations safely and effectively.

Facilitators can adapt modules to suit:

- Religious leaders and lay faith actors.
- Women-in-faith and youth-in-faith leaders.
- MFACC teams and interfaith councils.

Some modules require more theological confidence (e.g., Module 3), while others can be led by community facilitators with basic orientation (e.g., Modules 1 or 5). These modules are designed for flexible use, but many require

skilled facilitation. You do not need to be an expert facilitator, but you should:

- Create safe, non-judgmental space.
- Use scripture to guide reflection, not debate.
- Be ready to gently challenge harmful views.
- Invite different perspectives, especially from women and youth.
- Recognize when topics (like obedience or purity) may carry harmful weight and reframe towards protection, compassion and dignity.

Section 1: Methodology – mind–heart–faith facilitation

This training is grounded in the mind–Heart–Faith facilitation approach developed under the FPCC initiative. It recognizes that faith leaders are not just recipients of knowledge, they are holders of moral authority, interpreters of scripture and trusted conveners in their communities.

This training is designed to be modular and flexible. Facilitators can deliver it over a 1-day intensive workshop (6–7 hours); or two half-day sessions (3–4 hours each). Depending on time and context, individual modules may also be run as stand-alone sessions.

Target participants: While this tool is tailored for faith leaders, it can also be adapted for:

- Community-based faith-based organization (FBO) staff.
- Youth and women’s faith network representatives.
- Religious education instructors.

Prioritize participants who are actively involved in community teaching, preaching or mobilising around social or moral issues.

Rather than imposing external frameworks, this methodology creates space for faith leaders to reflect, question and reinterpret their values and roles in ending harmful practices. It allows them to build the confidence, fluency and tools needed to lead change in a way that is theologically sound, culturally grounded, and locally led.

This training and the activities it equips facilitators to lead are founded on the mind–heart–faith framework, a reflective and experiential learning process, exploring faith convictions, lived experiences and knowledge to influence positive social and behaviour change. The mind–heart–faith framework posits that engagement of the mind and heart are needed for faith-led transformation. Begin with mind (laws, facts, scripture): engaging the mind requires drawing on technical knowledge, resources, tools, pro-

cesses and people to provide evidence of facts and what works, to show the benefits of adopting positive practices or abandoning harmful ones. This may include discussing laws, looking at scriptures, reviewing health information and sharing facts and evidence.

- Then engage the heart (stories, emotions, personal impact): engaging the heart requires promoting reflection on experiences and emotions to unpack underlying drivers of behaviours and develop empathy and personal motivation for change; it may require analysing culture and power to identify the norms that underlie unequal opportunities. This may include hearing personal stories, sharing emotions relating a harmful practices, or recounting the personal impact of harmful and/or protective behaviours.
- Finally, move towards faith-based action: promoting change through faith-based action requires exploring spiritual beliefs, values and motivations, creating space to reflect on and positively interpret faith teachings and practices and to integrate action that can promote positive change. This may include integrating key messages into sermons and prayer groups or establishing faith-led protection mechanisms in the community.

This sequence helps avoid defensive responses and allows deeper engagement with sensitive issues like FGM or child marriage.

MIND – Building knowledge and legal understanding

Objective: Equip faith leaders with foundational information on harmful practices and the broader systems protecting children.

Content includes:

- National laws, religious rulings (e.g., fatwas, pastoral letters), and customary frameworks.
- Medical and psychological impacts of FGM and child marriage
- Myths and facts around religious justifications for harmful practices.
- Local data (if available) and testimonies from health/legal actors.

Facilitation tips:

- Invite health workers, child protection officers, or legal experts for open Q&A.
- Use true/false activities to spark discussion and surface misconceptions.

- Always contextualize the law within faith values (see Tools 2 and 10).

HEART – Cultivating empathy and reflective listening

Objective: Create safe and sacred spaces where faith leaders can reflect on lived experiences, listen with compassion and explore their own internal tensions.

Content includes:

- Survivor testimonies, live, anonymized, or recorded (ensure protection of survivors at all times and have referral pathways in place if needed).
- Personal stories of transformation by faith actors.
- Exercises on empathy, humility and listening across difference.

Facilitation tips:

- Begin with a values exercise: “What does protection mean in your tradition?”
- Allow moments of silence or prayer after sensitive testimonies.
- Let discomfort surface and be named without judgment.

FAITH – Grounding in theology and moral leadership

Objective: Equip faith leaders with scriptural arguments and spiritual tools to challenge harmful norms and lead value-based change.

Content includes:

- Paired scripture texts (e.g., Bible/Qur’an) on dignity, maturity, harm, consent.
- Discussions on misused verses and reinterpretation grounded in protection.
- Sermon-writing and faith messaging activities (see Tool 4).

Facilitation tips:

- Use the scripture and values cards in small groups (see Tool 4).
- Invite theologians or respected local scholars to co-facilitate.
- Close sessions with interfaith blessings, readings or shared prayer if appropriate.

This approach works because it recognizes that change is not just cognitive—it is spiritual, emotional and relational. By linking new knowledge to deep values and lived experiences, this methodology empowers faith leaders to speak from a place of integrity, not fear.

Section 2: Core modular content

This section outlines the core content areas to include in a training for faith leaders on harmful practices. Modules are designed to be modular, adaptable and co-delivered with local facilitators or thematic experts. Each module should integrate the mind–heart–faith methodology and include participatory exercises.

Each module includes suggested methods, scriptures and group tasks. Facilitators should:

- Choose the modules most relevant to their participants' context.
- Use the interactive methods provided.
- Adapt language and local examples based on the community.

Module 1: Faith, protection and the role of the faith leader

Objectives:

- Establish a shared understanding of faith leaders as protectors, not just teachers or moral authorities.
- Explore how different traditions frame dignity, justice, consent and childhood.

Sample activities:

- Scripture and value mapping (see Tool 4 – *Faith messaging & scripture cards*).
- 'My role, my voice' reflections: A short personal journaling or paired discussion activity where participants consider their role in either perpetuating or preventing harmful practices, and how their voice can promote protection and dignity (see box below for more details).
- Interfaith study of shared values (e.g., Qur'an 17:70 and Genesis 1:27 on dignity) (see box below for more details).

'My role, my voice' reflections

Estimated time: 30–45 minutes

Materials: Reflection prompts (print or flipchart), notebooks or blank paper

Objective: To help participants reflect on how their personal stories, beliefs and leadership roles shape their response to harmful practices such as FGM or child marriage.

Instructions:

- Begin with a quiet moment and invite participants to close their eyes and breathe deeply. Read aloud:
- "Each of us carries a voice; a voice that teaches, a voice that influences and, sometimes, a voice that stays silent. This space is for listening to your own voice."
- Distribute or read the following prompts:
 - When have I remained silent about a harmful practice, even if I felt unsure or uncomfortable?
 - What beliefs or values guided that silence or action?
 - Who or what helped me find my voice to speak or act differently?
 - What role do I want to play moving forward in my community?
- Invite participants to write or draw their answers (10–15 mins). Those who are uncomfortable writing can reflect silently.
- In small groups (2–3), ask them to share one insight or phrase they're willing to speak aloud.
- Bring the group back. Ask for volunteers to offer one word or sentence that captures what they discovered.

Facilitator note: Frame this as non-judgmental. Avoid debate. This is about acknowledging our past and choosing our future voice.

Interfaith study of shared values

Estimated time: 45–60 minutes

Materials: Printed scripture cards (or read aloud, see Tool 4 for examples), blank flipcharts, markers

Objective: To explore shared values across religious traditions and how they affirm the dignity and protection of all people — especially girls.

Instructions:

- Pair participants across faiths or traditions (or use intra-faith groups if more appropriate).
- Give each pair one scripture card from Tool 4 or read one verse aloud.
- Ask:
 - What does this verse say about human dignity or protection?
 - How does it relate to children, especially girls?
 - What local sayings, teachings or traditional stories carry a similar message?
- Each pair shares their reflections and adds keywords to a shared board or flipchart.

Optional variation: Use art or symbols, ask groups to draw or represent the values visually.

Facilitator note: This activity works well early in interfaith settings to build common ground and soften theological divides. Avoid technical debates about translation; focus on values.

Module 2: Understanding harmful practices

Objectives:

- Provide factual, medical and legal information on FGM and child marriage.
- Clarify how harmful practices violate both faith and national laws.

Sample Activities:

- Myth versus fact dialogue using local examples. See Tool 11 – *Digital advocacy and myth-busting guide* (for myth versus fact exercises); Tool 2 – *Legal entry points* (for linking law and scripture).
 - Adapt the provided myths to reflect local sayings and beliefs.
 - Work with local leaders to validate context-specific myths.
- Q&A with health and legal professionals.
- Group discussion: “How does my faith tradition talk about harm?”.

Module 3: Scripture and social norms

Objectives:

- Unpack contested verses and challenge harmful interpretations.
- Build capacity to speak confidently using scripture for protection.

Sample Activities:

- Group reflection using scripture cards.
- Theological role plays (e.g., sermon critique, debating a verse’s interpretation).
- Co-creation of scriptural messaging (see Tool 4 – *Faith messaging and scripture cards*; Tool 10 – *Policy advocacy toolkit*).

Module 4: Dialogue and facilitation skills

Objectives:

- Build confidence in leading inclusive, respectful conversations on sensitive topics.
- Strengthen empathy, listening and conflict navigation.

Sample activities:

- Mind–heart dialogue exercises: See TOOL 4 – *Faith messaging and scripture cards*, for an overview of the method. Exercises include empathy storytelling, moral dilemma discussion and silent reflection journaling. Use them as preparation before introducing scriptural texts.
- Tool 7 – *Women’s Empowerment Module* and Tool 8 – *Youth Dialogue Toolkit* (for inclusive facilitation practices).
- Listening triads: tell–retell–reflect.
- Simulation: Hosting a community conversation on early-marriage.

Mind–heart dialogue exercises

Estimated time: Used flexibly throughout the training

Objective: To move participants from intellectual understanding (mind), to emotional connection (heart), to spiritual action (faith).

When to use: Before or after content-heavy sections; when resistance or detachment is visible.

Sample exercises:

A. Feeling map (15 min):

- Ask participants to draw where they feel emotions in their body when they hear a survivor’s story or teaching on dignity (e.g., “I felt it in my chest”).
- Let them share what it meant for them.

B. Walk the line (20 min):

- Mark a line on the floor, put a card on one end with the word ‘agree’, a card with the word ‘disagree’ at the other end, and explain that the area in the middle represents ‘not sure’. Read statements like:
 - “Girls must be married young to protect them.”
 - “Faith always protects the vulnerable.”
- Participants step towards ‘agree’, ‘disagree’, or ‘not sure’.
- Ask participants to explain their position on the line. Encourage respectful listening and exchange.

C. Emotional journaling (15 min):

- After a testimony or scripture discussion, ask:
 - What emotion did you feel?
 - What does that emotion ask of you as a faith leader?

These exercises build empathy and soften rigid positions. Choose based on group maturity and comfort.

Listening triads

Estimated time: 30–45 minutes

Materials: None, just chairs or cushions for groups

Objective: To deepen listening skills, develop empathy and reflect on values through storytelling.

Instructions:

- Organize participants into groups of three. Assign roles:
 - Storyteller (A), who shares a real experience (3–4 mins).
 - Listener (B), who retells the story in their own words (2 mins).
 - Reflector (C), who shares what values, tensions, or emotions they heard (2 mins).
- Suggested prompts for the storyteller:
 - A time I questioned a harmful practice.
 - A time I used faith to protect someone.
 - A moment when my view on FGM or child marriage changed.
- Rotate roles until everyone has a turn. Allow extra time if the group needs it.

Facilitator note: Remind participants to listen with humility; the goal is not to be correct, but to understand how others experience these issues.

Module 5: Mobilising action and community engagement

Objectives:

- Explore real-life strategies to spark behaviour change in faith settings.
- Co-design action plans for community mobilization, sermon campaigns or youth mentoring.

Sample activities:

- Sermon-writing challenge.
- Planning a values-based campaign or interfaith event.
- Visioning: “What can my community look like in 5 years?”.

Optional add-on modules:

- Youth engagement (see Tool 8: *Mobilizing young faith leaders*).
- Digital and policy advocacy (see Tools 10 and 11).
- Tool 9 – *MFACC framework* (for collective mobilization).
- Tool 12 – *Reflect-act-reflect (R-A-R)* tool (for accountability and adaptation).

Section 4: Practical training activities and tools

Each of the following activities has been tested in faith settings and can be integrated across modules, and across any activities in this guide to engage participants. They are designed to be participatory, emotionally resonant and theologically anchored. Where possible, use co-facilitation with a faith leader and a trained facilitator.

A. Faith and protection value-mapping

Objective: Identify core protection values within religious texts and reflect on how they are (or are not) practised.

- **Method:** Use scripture cards or printed verses from Qur'an/Bible on dignity, consent, mercy, maturity. Scrip-

ture Cards are printed cards with 1–2 verses per card from the Bible or Qur'an, e.g., Genesis 1:27, Qur'an 2:195. Use these for pair or small-group reflection. See TOOL 4 – *Faith messaging and scripture cards* for examples.

- **Group Task:** Match each scripture to a value; discuss how it applies to harmful practices.
- **Variation:** Use images for low-literacy settings or proverbs from local traditions.
- **Linked Tools:** Tool 4 – *Faith Messaging & Scripture Cards*; Tool 7 – *Women's Empowerment Module* and Tool 8 – *Youth Dialogue Toolkit* (for inclusive facilitation practices).

B. Mind-heart dialogue circle

Objective: Foster personal reflection on the moral and emotional dimensions of harmful practices.

- **Method:** Share a real testimony (live or recorded) and ensure protection of survivors who share their stories. Select a testimony (real or anonymized) that touches on:
 - Personal or family experience with FGM or child marriage;
 - Spiritual or emotional struggle;
 - Turning point or action taken for change.
- After silent reflection, invite participants to name what stood out and what it means through a faith lens.
- Ensure consent and sensitivity if it is live.
- **Prompt:** “What does this story ask of me, as a person of faith and as a leader?”
- **Tip:** Close with a short prayer, scripture or blessing.

C. Sermon challenge

Objective: Help leaders practice speaking out using their own voice and scripture.

- **Task:** Draft a short sermon or message using three parts: (1) scripture, (2) real-life story, (3) community action.
- **Optional Sharing:** Deliver in a small group and receive peer feedback.
- **Linked Tools:** Tool 4 – *Faith messaging and scripture cards*; Tool 10 – *Policy advocacy toolkit*.

Sermon-writing – co-creation workshop

Estimated time: 45–60 minutes

Materials: Flipcharts, scripture cards, markers

Objective: To help faith leaders practice delivering protective messages grounded in their tradition, while integrating real stories and action.

Instructions:

- Break into small groups (3–5 people). Assign the task: ‘Write a short teaching/sermon/message that could be shared in a service or community gathering.’
- Use the 3-part structure:
 - Scripture or Faith Value: Choose a protective verse (e.g., dignity, justice, protection of the weak).
 - Real-Life Story/Testimony: Use a story shared earlier in the session, or invent a realistic example.
 - Community Call to Action: Suggest what the listener can do (e.g., talk to young people, host a girls’ group, confront myths).
- Ask each group to share their sermon (3–5 mins). Invite feedback:
 - Was it convincing?
 - Was it rooted in faith and compassion?
 - Would your community respond to it?

Consider recording the strongest messages and turning them into sermon guides or public radio content.

D. Theological role play

Objective: Explore real-world conversations and resistance.

- **scenario:** A congregant says, “Our religion requires it,” or “This is our tradition.”
- **roles:** Faith leader, community member, survivor advocate.
- **debrief:** Discuss what was hard, what helped and what scripture supports your response.

E. Scripture and myth-busting wall

Objective: Challenge false religious claims by pairing them with scriptural truths.

- **Activity:** On one side of paper or the wall, write common myths (e.g., “Islam says girls must be cut”).
- **On the other:** Match with scriptural counter-arguments or pastoral letters.
- **Use:** This can remain on the wall or prayer space during the full training.

Section 5: Tips for implementation and follow-up

This section supports programme teams and facilitators to roll out training in a way that is sustainable, inclusive and empowering. It includes planning advice and ideas for keeping engagement going beyond a single event.

Implementation tips

- Co-design with faith leaders
 - Hold a planning session with select leaders to co-define objectives and training format.
 - Ask what worked (or failed) in past trainings and adapt accordingly.
- Create a spiritually safe space
 - Start and end each session with a prayer, reflection or a scripture relevant to protection.
 - Use symbols from both faiths if interfaith, and let participants define the mood and tone.
- Use local facilitators and translators
 - Include facilitators who speak local theological “languages” and can link concepts to daily worship or rituals.
 - Use gender-balanced teams and co-facilitate with youth or survivors when appropriate.
- Keep it practical
 - Avoid abstract theology, ground concepts in daily community life.
 - Provide sermon templates, WhatsApp messages or case examples they can adapt.
- Celebrate small steps
 - Recognize participants who lead follow-up activities (e.g., community dialogue, sermon delivery).
 - Include feedback loops to gather stories of change.

Post-training: Reflect-act-reflect cycles

Training is just the beginning. Create spaces for ongoing learning, problem-solving, and support through:

- WhatsApp or Telegram Groups for peer exchange, updates and encouragement.
- Quarterly reflection circles: in person or virtual, to share stories, challenges and scriptural insights.
- Sermon watch: invite leaders to share recordings or notes from messages delivered, and reflect on community reactions.
- Mentoring chains: pair newer participants with more experienced ones for follow-up conversations.

These activities reinforce confidence and build a faith movement, not just a one-off training.

Annex: Safe referrals and survivor support

Faith leaders are often the first people community members turn to when disclosing harm. While religious actors are not expected to serve as caseworkers or medics, they must respond ethically, compassionately and effectively. Harmful practices like FGM and child marriage often involve medical risk, trauma and stigma—survivors need both spiritual support and access to formal services.

How to use this referral guide

- Keep a printed and digital copy of your local Referral Pathways Guide in places of worship, study circles and MFACC offices.
- Include a session on referrals in all trainings and peer-learning groups.

- Keep verified contact information confidential, do not share in sermons or public announcements.
- Coordinate with child protection actors to review and update contacts every 6 months.

Identifying referral pathways: Speak with:

- Local health centres or hospitals.
- Child protection units or community policing groups.
- Women's organizations and legal aid clinics.
- Local offices of UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), or faith-based NGOs.
- Elders, religious leaders, or community volunteers who are already active in anti-FGM/child marriage work.

Minimum ethical standards for referrals

- Seek consent before referring a child or survivor.
- Avoid promises of secrecy if national law requires reporting (e.g., in cases of child marriage).
- Never intervene alone. Your role is to walk with, not to rescue or diagnose.
- Speak with compassion, not judgment. Trauma-informed listening is essential.

Tips for training sessions – if possible invite a child protection officer of case working to present this part of the training

- Introduce the local referral guide using a short case scenario.
- Use role play to model safe, faith-sensitive responses to a disclosure.
- Help leaders memorize key hotlines or learn how to access them quickly.
- Reinforce that spiritual guidance is strengthened by practical support—not a replacement for it.

Sample referral mapping table (Customize per country or locality)

Sector	Service provider	Location	Contact info	Services offered	Notes
Legal	Ministry of Justice, Child Protection Unit			Legal aid, birth certificates, GBV response	Include Islamic court contacts if relevant
Legal	National Council for Childhood & Motherhood			Legal support, case management	Offers free hotline
Medical	Al-Salam Clinic			FGM complications, maternal care	Trained in survivor-centred care
Psychosocial	Women's Union			Counselling, shelter	Safe space for girls
Socioeconomic	Girls' Skills and Learning Centre			Vocational training and life skills	Safe space for girls, vocational training, educational activities and links to job markets

TOOL 6 – People-centred approaches for faith engagement

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy

Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights and safety of all participants, especially children and young people.

What this means for programme activities

Before activities

- Ensure venues are safe, private, and accessible.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple terms.
- Discuss confidentiality and clarify that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if individuals choose not to participate or to drop out at any point of the activity.
- Obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children, with parental consent where required. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place should individuals require support.

During activities

- Do not ask for personal or sensitive details in group settings.
- Encourage sharing of experiences as relevant, without naming those involved.
- If someone begins to disclose abuse or other traumatic experiences, listen respectfully, do not press for details and refer according to agreed pathways.
- Pause the activity if needed to protect participants.

After activities

- Keep notes anonymous and never include names or identifying details in reports.
- Store data securely and share only in general terms.
- If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately.
- If photos are taken ensure that faces and identifying details of survivors and children are hidden or obscured.

This tool offers a menu of simple, people-centred activities that faith leaders and facilitators can use to design messages, sermons and community action. The focus is on listening, empathy and reflection, and making sure community voices, especially those of women, young people and survivors, shape what is created.

You do not need to use all of these approaches or in any order. Choose the ones that fit your group and context.

Key guidance

- **Start with people:** Begin with listening and empathy, not solutions.
- **Keep it simple:** Use activities that you can facilitate with confidence.
- **Always test and reflect:** Any new message, activity or sermon must be tried with a small group first, then discussed in a reflection circle before wider use.
- **Link to other tools:** Many activities connect with other parts of this Guide (e.g., *Tool 4 – Scripture cards*, *Tool 10 – Policy advocacy*, *Tool 11 – Digital advocacy*, *Tool 12 – R-A-R*).

Menu of approaches:

Theme	Tools
1. Listening & empathy	• Storytelling circles → Invite personal stories. • Shared values dialogue → Use scripture and proverbs to surface protective values. • Youth expression → Art, poems, or skits to hear young voices.
2. Understanding & insight	• Dialogue wall → “What we want to protect / What we fear to lose.” • Problem statement builder → Create short, values-based statements about what needs to change.
3. Generating ideas	• Idea brainstorm (“How might we...?”) → Turn problems into questions and co-create solutions. • Scenario Walkthroughs → Imagine how new ideas would play out in daily life.
4. Testing, reflection, & commitment	• Mini-pilots → Try out a message, sermon, or activity with a small group. • Commitment & integration → Leaders and groups commit to actions (e.g. sermons, mentoring, campaigns) and embed new practices into regular worship, youth groups, or community routines.

1. Listening and empathy activities:**Tool: Storytelling circles (faith-responsive)**

Purpose: To build empathy and elicit experiences through safe, values-based storytelling. Storytelling helps communities ‘listen with the heart’ before debating practices or solutions.

Who to involve

- Begin with peer groups where participants feel safe (e.g., women, youth, survivors).
- Facilitators should be sensitive to trauma and match participants by gender.

When to use

- At the start of a process to build trust.
- Any time you need to reconnect discussions to lived reality and values.

Time and group size: 45–60 minutes; 6–12 participants per circle.

What you need

- A quiet, private space where people feel safe.
- A facilitator to guide gently, not interrogate.
- Optional: notebooks, art materials, or audio recording (with permission).

What to do

- Begin with a grounding practice, such as a prayer, scripture reading or moment of silence.
- This activity is not about asking for trauma. It’s about helping people connect their life experiences with values, choices and influences, especially where faith and protection intersect. Use gentle prompts to draw out moments

of transformation, family expectations, silence, protection or internal conflict, even small ones.

Facilitator tips

- Start with broad prompts that let people choose what to share. Don’t mention harmful practices right away. Instead, help them connect with their values, role models and quiet decisions that shaped who they are.
- Invite the participants to reflect privately on their life story, not only the challenges but the choices, voices and values that shaped them. Use prompts like:
 - A time when I felt pressure to act in a way I didn’t fully believe in.
 - A moment I saw someone protect another and how it changed me.
 - A lesson from my parents or faith that still guides me today.
 - A time I spoke out or stayed silent and what I learned.
- Ask participants to share their reflections. Optional: let participants share in pairs before speaking to the whole group. Remember that some participants may repeat harmful beliefs (e.g., ‘cutting is a religious duty’ or ‘girls must marry early to avoid sin’). Instead of confronting harshly:
 - Ask, “Where do we think this belief comes from?”
 - Invite scripture-based questions like, “What does our faith say about care, justice and consent?”
 - Write down what the group thinks are ‘myths’ versus ‘faith teachings’ on a wall or board.
 - Avoid ‘fact versus faith’ arguments. Focus on values: protection, health, dignity, love.
- Listen without judgment. Do not press for trauma or sensitive details. Focus on values.
- Reflect together: Ask, “What values shine through these stories?” Capture these on a flipchart.
- Close with a short scripture or faith reflection linking the stories to dignity, mercy or protection.

Outputs: Personal stories that surface how people understand protection, dignity, fear, family expectations or spiritual responsibility, not just what happened to them, but how they made meaning of it.

Facilitator tips

- For low-literacy groups: use drawing, symbols or oral narration.
- For youth: encourage creative forms like poems, skits or drawings.
- Always thank participants and affirm their courage to share.

Cross-links

- Use *Tool 4 – Scripture cards* to anchor stories in shared faith values.
- Insights can feed into the dialogue wall or problem statement builder.

Tool: Shared values dialogue

Purpose: To explore scripture, sayings or traditions that highlight protective values. This activity helps groups see how faith can be a resource for dignity, compassion and justice and how some values may be misused.

Who to involve

- Small mixed groups of 8–16 participants, or separate groups by age/gender if more appropriate.
- At least one faith leader who can help reflect on scripture.
- Participants can come from a single faith denomination or from across different faith denominations, depending on what is deemed more suitable.

When to use

- After the storytelling tool, when trust has been built.
- Early in a training or dialogue, to identify common ground before a sensitive debate.
- Before moving into insight-gathering (e.g., dialogue wall).

Time and group size: 45–60 minutes, 8–16 participants, ideally in small clusters of 4–6.

What you need

- A facilitator to moderate discussion.
- Scripture or proverb cards (see *Tool 4 – Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards*).
- Flipcharts, sticky notes or markers.
- Comfortable seating, ideally in a circle or small groups.
- Optional: audio speaker or printed stories.

What to do

- **Set the tone:** Welcome participants with a spiritual invocation or reflection: “We are here to listen with care, not to debate or judge.”

- **Story circle:** Invite storytellers to speak (or play a recorded story). Use anonymization or third-person narration if needed.
- **Reflection round:** Ask: “What stood out for you in her story?” “How did it make you feel? What values did it raise?”
- **Faith response:** A faith leader offers a short reflection grounded in scripture: “Our faith calls us to protect dignity.”
- **Call to action:** Ask: “What can we do differently after hearing this?” Encourage participants to name one thing they will say, share or change.

Outputs

- A visual ‘values wall’ showing protective versus misused values.
- Collective recognition of values that align with child protection.

Facilitator tips

- Don’t overlook the role of elder women, parents or traditional authorities in shaping decisions around marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and family honour. Invite their perspectives or make sure they are represented, even if not in every group.
- Keep focus on values, not theological accuracy. Avoid debates about translation.
- What to look for:
 - Shift in posture, emotion and openness.
 - Gender or age differences in responses.
 - Signs of shared empathy or ‘moral shock’.
- For low-literacy groups: use symbols, images or orally share verses.
- For interfaith groups: pair verses across traditions (e.g., Qur’an 17:70 and Genesis 1:27 on dignity).
- Always affirm that faith calls us to protect, not harm.

Cross-links

- Builds on storytelling circles by linking stories to values.
- Outputs feed into the dialogue wall and problem statement builder.
- Can be combined with *Tool 4 – Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards* for ready-made materials.

Tool: Youth expression (art, writing, drama)

Purpose: To give young people safe, creative ways to express their views. Facilitators should create a safe, non-judgmental environment. This approach ensures youth voices are heard and valued, even when they may be hesitant to speak in formal discussions.

Who to involve

- Youth groups (girls, boys, mixed or separate).
- Young people in schools, madrassas, youth clubs or faith groups.

When to use

- As an early entry point to bring youth perspectives into dialogue.
- To prepare materials or insights for community events or trainings.
- Alongside adult dialogues, so intergenerational perspectives can later be compared.

Time and group size: 45–90 minutes, depending on activity type, 10–30 participants.

What you need

- Paper, pens and markers.
- Safe space for performance or exhibition.
- Facilitators with experience in participatory arts.
- Optional: art supplies, musical instruments or props for drama.

What to do

- Introduce the activity with a grounding statement: “Our faith teaches us to protect life and dignity. Today, we want to hear your voices on what that means to you.”
- Choose a creative format: drawings, poems, essays, songs or short skits.
- Give prompts such as:
 - “What does my faith say about protecting children?”
 - “A time I saw someone act with dignity and courage.”
 - “How can faith guide us to protect without harm?”
- Allow time for creation (20–40 minutes). Walk around to encourage and support.
- Share outputs in pairs, small groups or in a short exhibition or performance.
- Close with reflection: “What value do these creations highlight about our community and our faith?”

Outputs

- Creative expressions (art, writing, drama) that reveal youth perspectives on faith and protection.
- Materials that can be showcased in schools, congregations or community meetings.
- Emerging youth leaders whose voices can be amplified in advocacy.

Facilitator tips

- Showcase youth outputs respectfully: display art in community spaces, read poems during gatherings or perform skits in schools.
- Engage a faith leader to reflect briefly on the youth’s work, grounding it in scripture and values.
- Ensure no youth is pressured to share personal stories publicly. Creative formats should feel safe.
- For sensitive contexts, use anonymous displays (art posted without names).

Cross-links

- Insights can feed into the dialogue wall or problem statement builder.
- Outputs can be used in digital advocacy (Tool 11) or showcased during policy advocacy (Tool 10) events.

2. Understanding and insight tools:**Tool: Dialogue wall – “What we want to protect / What we fear to lose”**

Purpose: To help communities name the values and fears that drive practices. This shows both the protective intentions and the risks or losses they fear if traditions change.

Who to involve

- 10–20 participants per group.
- Can be gender/age-specific (e.g., women, youth, elders) or mixed.
- Include faith leaders or elders if trust is sufficient.

When to use

- After storytelling or shared values dialogue.
- Before moving into idea generation.
- When you need to elicit tensions without direct confrontation.

Time and group size: 60–75 minutes, 10–20 participants.

What you need

- Two large flipcharts titled:
 - “What we want to protect”
 - “What we fear to lose”
- Markers and sticky notes (or small pieces of paper).
- Prompts on cards (based on local wording + shared scriptural values).
- Quiet, neutral space where emotional honesty feels safe.
- Optional: coloured tape or string to connect values and tensions.

What to do

- **Set the tone:** Open with a faith-based reflection on protection and responsibility: “Our traditions teach us to protect the dignity of life, to love and not harm. Today, we’re not here to debate customs but to reflect on the difficult choices our families make and the reasons behind them.”
- **Introduce the dialogue wall:** Draw or post two columns:

What we want to protect	What we fear to lose
(e.g., tradition, family honour)	(e.g., respect, marriage options)

Explain: “These are not opposites. Many times, they are both true and that’s what we want to understand. Thinking about what matters most in our community, such as our children, our dignity, our way of life, what do we want to protect, and what do we fear losing if we change?”

- **Facilitator tips:** Use open questions like:
 - “What are we proud of?”
 - “What are we worried about disappearing?”
 - “What role does faith play in what we protect or fear losing?”
- **Small group reflections:** Divide participants into pairs or trios. Give them simple prompts, either as printed cards or read aloud, to guide their conversation. Example prompts:
 - “Describe a time you felt unsure about what was right.”
 - “When have you seen someone protect another, and why did it matter?”
 - “Has your view on a tradition ever changed? What influenced that shift?”

Facilitator tips: *Keep the prompts open-ended and non-threatening. If participants are hesitant, let them choose which question they’d like to answer or respond in drawing or metaphor.*

Ask them to write 1–2 phrases for each column:

- “What we want to protect” (e.g., tradition, our community values, dignity, education for our children).
- “What we fear to lose” (e.g., marriage, respect, family honour, status, faith, belonging).
- **Wall creation and discussion:** Groups post their notes in the two columns. The facilitator reads some aloud and invites reflection:
 - “Are there any values that appear on both sides?”
 - “Which of these come from our faith? Which come from fear?”
 - “What do our sacred texts teach us when values seem to clash?”
 - “What do our traditions, culture and faith already teach us about protection, dignity and care, especially for girls and boys?”
 - “How can we build on these shared values to protect our daughters from harm today?”

Facilitator tips: *Encourage reflection on what is already working, not just what needs to change. Use this as a bridge between generational wisdom, lived tradition and protective faith teachings.*

- **Close with a question:** “What if there’s another way to protect what we care about without causing harm?”

Outputs

- A visual ‘dialogue wall’ showing protective values and fears.
- Early identification of value tensions (e.g., honour versus dignity).
- Shared language that can guide solution design.

Facilitator tips

- For low-literacy: use pictures or symbols.
- For sensitive groups: run separate walls (e.g., women only, youth only) and compare later.
- Invite a faith leader to offer a brief reflection on how scripture calls for protection without harm.
- Look/listen for:
 - Deep protective values (purity, faith, honour, obedience).
 - Implicit fears (shame, exclusion, blame).
 - Scripture or sayings being used to justify silence or pain.
 - Cracks in the certainty, i.e., when someone says, “But is this the only way?”

Cross-links

- Builds directly on storytelling and values dialogue.
- Feeds into the problem statement builder.
- Links with *Tool 4 – Faith Messaging and scripture cards* for anchoring in shared values.

Tool: Problem statement builder – framing challenges in faith and values

Purpose: To turn community reflections into short, shared statements that describe what needs to change. This helps groups own the challenge in language rooted in faith and values, not blame.

Who to involve

- Participants who have already taken part in the storytelling or dialogue wall.
- Youth, women, survivors, faith leaders or mixed groups.
- At least one facilitator who can help keep the focus on values, not arguments.

When to use

- After the dialogue wall, before idea brainstorming in this tool, so the group has a clear challenge to work from.

Time and group size: 45–60 minutes, 6–15 participants.

What you need

- Quiet space for reflection before sharing aloud.
- Flipchart or large paper.
- Markers or sticky notes.
- Optional: scripture/value cards from Tool 4.

What to do

- **Revisit the dialogue wall** and read aloud a few examples from each column.
- **Introduce the statement builder.** Write this on a flip-chart or hand out cards:
 - Who is affected?
 - What values or teachings does this go against?
 - What needs to change — not just in behaviour, but in hearts and minds?
- **Small group drafting:** Ask participants to work in pairs or trios to draft a one- or two-sentence problem or challenge statement. Encourage use of values-based or faith-rooted language, e.g.,:
 - “Many girls are cut because families fear shame, but this goes against our teaching of mercy and dignity.”
 - “In our community, child marriage is seen as protection, yet it often leads to suffering that contradicts our faith.”
- **Share back:** Post drafts on the wall or read them aloud. Discuss:
 - “What do these statements tell us about what really matters here?”
 - “Do we agree with these? Would you feel safe sharing them in your own circles?”
- **Consolidate into 1–2 shared statements:** With facilitator guidance, combine overlapping statements into one clear, powerful sentence that the group feels ownership over. This statement can now be used to guide solutions together. Optional Statement Templates
 - “We want to protect [value], but we are afraid of [consequence]. This causes [harm]. We need to find a better way that honours our faith.”
 - “In our community, [practice] is done to [intention], but the result is [unintended effect]. We believe faith can show us another way.”

Outputs

- 1–2 short, values-based problem statements the group owns
- A shared sense of ‘what really needs to change’ in their community.

Facilitator tips

- Be prepared for emotional moments. Affirm what’s shared without judgment and gently guide the group towards: “Yes, that’s our reality now... and what else is possible?”
- Avoid framing that blames one group (e.g., ‘mothers force it’). Focus on shared responsibility.
- For hesitant groups, allow anonymous drafting.
- For interfaith groups, invite scripture from each tradition to support the statements.
- What to look/listen for:
 - Ownership of the words means participants name what they see and feel as real in their community.

This step is not about accepting harm, but acknowledging truth together so that reflection and change can begin.

- Tension between tradition and teaching
- Use of scriptural or moral reasoning
- Growing clarity about what needs to change, even if the practice is not yet named directly

Cross-links

- Builds directly on Dialogue Wall.
- Provides the foundation for Idea Brainstorm
- Can be supported with *Tool 4 – Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards* to ground in faith texts.

3. Generating ideas tools:

Tool: Idea brainstorm – “How might we...?”

Purpose: To co-create protective, faith-rooted alternatives to harmful practices. The brainstorm builds directly on problem statements, turning them into open-ended “How might we...?” questions that invite creativity and collective ownership.

Who to involve

- Mixed groups including youth, women and faith leaders.
- Keep group size manageable (6-10 people): if large, split into smaller subgroups.

When to use

- After the problem statement builder and before scenario walkthroughs or testing.

Time and group size: 60–90 minutes, 10–25 participants (can divide into subgroups of 5–8).

What you need

- Flipcharts or large sheets of paper.
- Sticky notes or index cards.
- Markers.
- Optional: “How Might We” prompt cards.
- Scripture/value cards from Tool 4.

What to do

1. **Revisit the problem statement(s).** Write one clearly at the front of the room.
 - Example: “We want to protect girls, but families fear shame if their girls are not cut.”
2. **Reframe as a question.**
 - “How might we protect girls without families fearing shame?”
 - “How might we create blessings that honour dignity without harm?”

- 3. Silent idea-writing.** Each participant writes 2–3 ideas on sticky notes.
- 4. Group clustering.** In subgroups, share and cluster ideas into themes.
- 5. Prioritize.** Use dots or hand votes: each person chooses their top two ideas.
- 6. Faith anchoring.** Match top ideas with scripture or values (mercy, dignity, maturity). Ask:
 - “Which of these reflects our faith?”
 - “Which could be shared in a sermon or prayer?”
- 7. Share back.** Each group presents 1–2 ideas, explaining why they are workable and faith-aligned.

Outputs: 2–3 faith-anchored, community-generated ideas ready for testing. A record of other ideas that may be explored later.

Facilitator tips

- Keep the tone creative and hopeful. Remind participants: “All ideas are welcome, we’ll refine later.”
- Support every idea and encourage building on each other ideas rather than putting ideas down and looking at why they can’t work.
- If harmful suggestions arise, redirect gently: “Which value does that reflect? Could we protect that value in another way?”
- For hesitant groups, allow drawing instead of writing.
- Always close with encouragement and affirmation of community creativity.

Cross-links

- Builds on problem statements.
- Leads directly into scenario walkthroughs and mini-pilots.
- Faith anchoring can be strengthened with *Tool 4 – Faith Messaging and Scripture Cards*.

Tool: Scenario walk-throughs – testing ideas through stories

Purpose: To test new ideas in a safe, fictional way before real-life piloting. Groups ‘walk through’ everyday scenarios (e.g., a family decision, a sermon, a community event) to

see how people might react. This helps identify risks, barriers and enablers while keeping the discussion non-confrontational.

Who to involve

- 8–20 participants.
- Mixed groups (youth, women, faith leaders, elders) or targeted groups depending on the idea being tested.
- Include people familiar with the audience for the idea (e.g., mothers if the idea involves mothers).

When to use

- After generating ideas.
- Before mini-pilots, to refine ideas and reduce risk.

Time and group size: 60–75 minutes, small groups of 4–6 for scenario work, then plenary sharing.

What you need

- Scenario prompts (written, spoken or co-created with the group).
- Flipcharts or scenario worksheets.
- Markers or pens.
- Scripture/value cards for faith anchoring.

What to do

- **Set the frame:** “We will test our ideas by imagining how they would play out in daily life. This is fictional, not a judgment; just exploring possibilities.”
- **Choose a scenario prompt:** Give each group one of these sample scenarios (ensure these are contextualized or let them co-create their own):
 - A mother decides against FGM for her daughter. Her in-laws are angry. The faith leader in her village hears about it.
 - A group of girls creates an alternative rite of passage and invites elders to join.
 - A young man asks to marry a girl who hasn’t been cut. The imam’s wife supports them, but others protest.
 - A youth leader uses scripture to speak about consent and dignity in Friday prayers.

- **Guided scenario walk-through:** Ask each group to reflect and write:

Prompt	Guiding questions
What happens next?	Who reacts? What do they say or do? What conflict or support arises?
What values are in tension?	What does the community want to protect? What do they fear losing?
What faith message could support this change?	What scripture or value could help open hearts? Who could say it?
What helps this succeed — or fail?	Think socially, spiritually, practically.
How could we adapt this idea to be safer, bolder, or more realistic?	Refine and improve your solution idea through the story.

- **Share back and discuss:** Each group presents their scenario as a mini-story:
 - What happened?
 - What was hard?
 - What helped?
 - What would they change?
- The facilitator helps connect this back to earlier values and idea generation. Ask:
 - “Could this actually happen here? What would it take?”
 - “Who needs to be involved to make this work?”
 - “What adaptations would you suggest?”

Outputs

- A set of refined ideas, adjusted for likely community reactions.
- Scenarios that can later be used in sermons, drama or advocacy.

Facilitator tips

- For low-literacy groups, narrate scenarios or use images.
- In sensitive contexts, anonymize or fictionalize situations to avoid personal blame.
- Always close by affirming that faith offers resources for protection and dignity.

Cross-links

- Builds directly on idea brainstorm.
- Prepares ideas for mini-pilots.
- Can link with youth expression for drama-based testing.

4. Testing, reflection and commitment

Tool: Mini-pilots – testing ideas safely

Purpose: To try out a new idea (sermon, dialogue, ritual, campaign, community activity) with a small group before using it widely. Mini-pilots give early feedback, show what works and help adapt ideas to be safer and more effective.

Who to involve

- 1–2 idea ‘owners’ (those who co-created the idea: faith leaders, youth, women’s group leaders).
- 5–15 participants as a test audience (youth group, women’s circle, small congregation gathering).
- A facilitator or note-taker to observe and guide feedback.

When to use

- After the scenario walkthroughs and before reflection circles.
- Any time a new message, sermon, ritual or activity is being developed.

Time and group size: Flexible: 1–2 hours for the pilot, plus time for feedback, 5–15 participants.

What you need

- An idea to test (such as a message, sermon, dialogue format, ritual, story, activity).
- A simple plan: who introduces/facilitates the idea and what questions/approaches will be used to collect feedback on the idea, assess whether it is desirable and viable and what is needed to improve it.
- **Prepare:** Work with the idea owner (faith leader, youth rep, elder) to answer:
 - What is the idea? (Sermon, story circle, blessing, conversation starter?)
 - What value does it reflect? (e.g., dignity, protection, maturity)
 - Who will lead it?
 - Where will it take place?
 - Who will be invited? (gender-separated if sensitive)
 - What will success look like?

Keep it low-pressure. This is a test, not a campaign.

- **Run the Activity:** Let the activity unfold with the intended participants. Facilitators observe quietly and support as needed. Take light notes on:
 - Reactions – Who nodded, smiled, looked uneasy, spoke up?

- Emotion – Was there tension? Curiosity? Agreement?
- Faith references – Did people affirm or challenge the scripture/values used?
- **Gather feedback immediately after:** Reflection Prompts (small group or 1:1)
 - “What part of this activity did you like?”
 - “Did anything make you uncomfortable or unsure?”
 - “What felt true to your faith or values?”
 - “Would you like to see this again in your family or community?”
 - “How would people in your community respond to this activity?”
 - “How can this be improved for your community?”
 - “Who else should be involved?”
 - What to look/listen for
- **Internal shifts:** “I never thought of it that way before.”
- **Value tension:** “It felt right, but I was still afraid.”
- **New openings:** “I’d like to speak about this in my group.”
- **Blockers:** “I liked it, but others won’t accept it.”
- **Scriptural interpretation challenges:** “The verse was good, but people need time to understand it.”
- **Document and debrief:** Facilitators write a short reflection:
 - What worked well?
 - What didn’t land as expected?
 - What quotes or reactions were most revealing?
 - What needs to be adjusted and improved?
 - Log feedback in a simple record (quotes, changes, next steps).

Example mini-pilot ideas

Idea	Pilot context	Feedback example
Dignity sermon for youth	Friday youth session at mosque	“That was the first time I heard this verse used like that. It made sense.”
Blessing of uncut girls	Women's prayer circle	“It felt nice. But some still looked unsure — we need more explanation.”
Marriage and maturity story circle	Bible group with parents	“The story helped. It’s easier to talk like this than be told what to do.”

Outputs

- Early feedback on clarity, resonance and risks and an activity.
- Adjusted version of the idea, ready for reflection circles.
- Quotes and insights to use later in reporting or advocacy.

Facilitator tips

- Keep the pilot low-stakes: “this is a test, not a final version”.
- Choose a safe, trusted space.
- Pay attention to body language as much as words.
- Encourage honesty by allowing anonymous feedback if needed.
- Do not ask leading questions to activity participants and ensure a safe space where all can share their thoughts honestly.
- always thank participants and affirm their role as co-creators.

Cross-links

- Builds on scenario walkthroughs.
- Can be integrated with Tool 12 – *Reflect-Act-Reflect* for ongoing adaptation.

Tool: Commitment and integration – carrying new practices forward

Purpose: To ensure tested ideas become part of everyday faith and community life. This tool combines pledges (personal or collective commitments) with integration planning (embedding practices into routines).

Who to involve

- Faith leaders (imams, pastors, elders, lay leaders).
- Women’s and youth groups.
- Other influencers (teachers, CSOs, traditional leaders).

When to use

- After mini-pilots, once ideas are tested and refined.
- At community events, training closures or interfaith gatherings.
- During planning with faith networks or multi-faith action coordination committees (MFACC).

Time and group size: 60–90 minutes, 8–20 participants.

What you need

- Pledge cards or forms.
- Integration planning template (questions: Where will this practice live? Who leads? How often? Materials? Risks/supports?).
- Flipcharts or worksheets.

What to do

- **Introduce:** “We have tested and reflected. Now we commit to carry these practices forward and plan how to make them last.”
- **Pledge:** Invite participants to write or state a pledge (personal or group). Examples: Preach monthly; Mentor youth to speak on protection.
- **Integration planning:** As a group, answer:
 - Where will this live? (sermons, women’s groups, youth clubs).
 - Who will lead it? (faith leader, peer mentor, women’s group).
 - How often? (monthly, annually, linked to rituals).
 - What support is needed? (scripture cards, sermon scripts).
 - What risks might block it? How to overcome?
- **Document:** Capture on flipcharts or worksheets.
- **Close:** Public affirmation such as pledges read aloud, signed or displayed. Optional prayer or blessing of commitments.

Outputs

- Written/spoken pledges.
- One-page integration plan with roles, routines and follow-up.

Facilitator tips

- Keep pledges realistic with small, achievable actions.
- Encourage joint ownership (e.g., youth + faith leader).
- Public visibility strengthens accountability (display in places of worship, community halls). For sensitive contexts, allow anonymous pledges or group commitments.

Cross-links

- Can link with *Tool 10 – Policy Advocacy* for wider institutional support.
- Can be monitored through *Tool 12 – Reflect–Act–Reflect* for ongoing adaptation.

TOOL 7 - Women's empowerment and faith reflection module

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy

Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights and safety of all participants, especially children and youth.

What this means for programme activities

Before activities

- Ensure venues are safe, private and accessible.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple terms.
- Discuss confidentiality and clarify that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if individuals choose not to participate or to drop out at any point of the activity.
- Obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children, with parental consent where required. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place should individuals require support.

During activities

- Do not ask for personal or sensitive details in group settings.
- Encourage sharing of experiences as relevant, without naming those involved.
- If someone begins to disclose abuse or other traumatic experiences, listen respectfully, do not press for details and refer according to agreed pathways.
- Pause the activity if needed to protect participants.

After activities

- Keep notes anonymous and never include names or identifying details in reports.
- Store data securely and share only in general terms.
- If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately.
- If photos are taken ensure that faces and identifying details of survivors and children are hidden or obscured.

Creating safe, sacred and strategic spaces for faith-based women's leadership in ending harmful practices

This module centres women of faith, as caregivers, tradition-bearers, moral leaders, and change-makers, in the conversation on ending female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. Drawing from both scripture and lived experience, it invites women into a co-reflective space where faith becomes a source of protection, not pain.

This tool combines RfP's 'Women's Witness' framework (see box below) with practical tips for inclusion, co-design and faith-informed advocacy. It is structured to support stand-alone workshops or to be embedded in other programme phases (e.g., Human centred design, training, advocacy).

What is RfP's Women's Witness Framework?

The *Women's Witness framework*, developed by Religions for Peace, recognises women as moral leaders who speak from both faith and lived experience. It affirms that when women share their personal stories of harm, courage, and conscience rooted in their beliefs, they offer a form of spiritual and social leadership.

This is not about giving testimony in court. It is about giving voice to truth in a sacred community setting to protect others and honour life.

In this tool, Women's Witness shows up through:

- Storytelling about faith and transformation (Step 4).
- Reflections on scripture and values (Step 3).
- Designing actions grounded in belief and experience (Step 5).

It reminds us that when women speak as witnesses, not just participants, they lead change from the inside out.

Objectives

- Create spiritually and socially safe spaces for women to reflect on harmful practices.
- Affirm theological and moral foundations for women's protection and voice.
- Co-design pathways for women's leadership in prevention, dialogue and mentoring.

Step-by-step guide

Step 1: Identify and invite diverse women's faith groups

Use mapping tools (or adapt Tool 1) to identify:

- Women's groups linked to mosques, churches or interfaith networks.
- Rural/urban representation, different denominations, young women's mentors.
- Widows, converts, healers or spiritual guardians, who are often excluded from formal consultations.
- Elderly women and grandmothers, especially those seen as tradition-holders or custodians of rites, whose perspectives are essential in reflecting on change and shifting norms.
- Traditional practitioners or 'circumcizers', if safe and appropriate, can be invited to share their experiences and engage in respectful faith-rooted dialogue that honours their role while exploring new paths to dignity and protection.

Build partnerships via Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committee (MFACC) networks or respected community connectors. Ensure early involvement builds trust and shapes the session structure.

Step 2: Create safe and sacred dialogue spaces

Facilitate small-group circles where women feel physically, emotionally and spiritually protected. Choose familiar venues (faith centres, women's halls) and use women-only facilitators where appropriate.

Encourage reflection on lived realities:

- "When did you first hear about FGM or child marriage?"
- "What values guided your views then and now?"
- "Where does your faith give you the strength to speak up?"

Let scripture guide the mood:

- "Blessed are the peacemakers..." (Matthew 5:9).
- "God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." (Qur'an 13:11).

Step 3: Faith reflections and values mapping

Use scripture cards or oral storytelling (from Tool 4) to frame small-group discussions. Ask:

- "What values does this verse highlight?"
- "How does it speak to girls' protection?"
- "How has it been used in your community to protect or to justify?"

Facilitators cluster responses into shared values such as mercy, dignity, compassion, protection and justice. Emphasize values that affirm girls' and boys' safety, voice and well-being. Invite reflection on how some values, like 'purity' or 'obedience', may be interpreted in ways that cause harm or pressure. Explore how faith calls us towards healing, consent and honouring each person as created in God's image. Discuss tensions between tradition and belief, and pathways to realignment.

Step 4: Intergenerational listening and dialogue

- “What wisdom do elders hold?”
- “What hope do younger women bring?”
- “How can we walk forward together?”

Pair women across age groups to reflect together:

“Give the word to our faith” storytelling approach

Adapted from Seeds of Change: Uniting Faith Communities to Protect Girls’ Rights – Honouring Life, Preserving Dignity (Religions for Peace)

This is a structured storytelling method that brings people together to reflect on harmful practices like FGM or child marriage through personal experience and faith. It supports honest, respectful dialogue across generations.

Purpose: To create a sacred space where stories of change, regret or moral courage can be shared, heard and used to inspire faith-led action.

Group set up: 12–20 participants

- Include 3–5 elder women (e.g. mothers, grandmothers, spiritual leaders or former cutters).
- Include 6–10 younger women or girls (ages approx. 15–35).
- 1–2 women facilitators trained in safe and respectful dialogue.

Note: This method can also be used in men-only or youth-only groups.

Total time: About 2 to 2.5 hours

Facilitation steps

1. Open the circle (15 min)

- Start with a short prayer or scripture (e.g. Micah 6:8 or Qur’an 16:90). Explain: “This is a safe space to share stories of how our views on FGM or child marriage have changed and how faith helped guide us.”
- Set three rules: Listen without interrupting; No one is forced to speak; and Stories stay in the group unless permission is given.

2. Elder storytelling (30–40 min)

- Invite 3–5 elders to share their experiences. You can prompt them with:
 - When did you begin to question FGM or child marriage?
 - What made you hesitate or change your mind?
 - What did your faith teach you in that moment?
 - What would you say now to a girl, parent or your younger self?
- Pass a small item (like a cloth or candle) to mark whose turn it is to speak.

3. Youth reflection (30–40 min)

- Young participants gather in small groups to reflect on what they heard. Ask:
 - What part of the story touched you?
 - What values did you hear?
 - What do you hope for girls in your community?
 - What does your faith call you to do?

4. Share back and close (30 min)

- Bring the group together again. Invite young people to share what they heard or felt. Then ask:
 - What values are we hearing? (Write these up: e.g. compassion, protection, courage).
 - What small step can we take as a community?

5. Closing blessing (10–15 min)

- End with a shared prayer, verse or song led by both an elder and a young person if possible.

Facilitator tips: Use a familiar, quiet space where people feel safe. Invite people ahead of time to prepare a story if helpful. You can also use anonymous stories or fictionalized examples when needed. Avoid rushing.

Step 5: Co-create women's roles and next steps

Invite women to brainstorm how they would like to lead or support change, e.g.,:

- Becoming peer mentors or storytellers.
- Hosting scriptural reflection circles.
- Producing faith-aligned campaign messages or prayer gatherings.
- Joining policy forums or girl protection networks.

Record their ideas using community murals, audio clips, values trees or prayer wall statements — especially in low-literacy contexts.

Outputs and documentation

- Vision boards or murals with shared protective values.
- Audio-recorded testimonies or reflections (with consent).
- Community pledges for girl protection framed in faith language.
- Names of interested mentors, dialogue facilitators and advocates.

TOOL 8 - Youth-led dialogue and innovation toolkit

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy

Safeguarding means preventing and responding to any harm linked to our work. It includes respecting the dignity, rights and safety of all participants, especially children and youth.

What this means for programme activities

Before activities

- Ensure venues are safe, private and accessible.
- Explain the purpose of the activity in simple terms.
- Discuss confidentiality and clarify that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if individuals choose not to participate or to drop out at any point of the activity.
- Obtain informed consent from adults and assent from children, with parental consent where required. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place should individuals require support.

During activities

- Do not ask for personal or sensitive details in group settings.
- Encourage sharing of experiences as relevant without naming those involved.
- If someone begins to disclose abuse or other traumatic experiences, listen respectfully, do not press for details and refer according to agreed pathways.
- Pause the activity if needed to protect participants.

After activities

- Keep notes anonymous and never include names or identifying details in reports.
- Store data securely and share only in general terms.
- If a safeguarding concern is raised, follow agreed referral pathways to child protection or survivor services immediately.
- If photos are taken ensure that faces and identifying details of survivors and children are hidden or obscured.

This toolkit equips programme teams and facilitators to meaningfully engage youth in faith-based efforts to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. It recognizes youth as both moral agents and cultural innovators. Built around participatory and intergenerational dialogue, this tool helps youth shape their own messages, roles and contributions.

Objectives:

- Empower youth as faith-informed change agents.
- Promote intergenerational exchange on harmful practices and faith.
- Support youth-led co-creation of advocacy, dialogue and mobilization initiatives.

Materials checklist

- Scripture cards and faith value prompts (from Tool 4).
- Art supplies (markers, posters, stickers, etc.).
- Audio/video recording tools (optional).
- Youth pledge cards or affirmation slips.
- Sample messaging templates or visuals for inspiration.

Session themes

- My Faith and My Future – How faith shapes my vision of dignity, maturity and protection.
- Breaking Silence – How harmful practices affect youth and how to speak up.
- Intergenerational Trust – Finding shared values and bridging perspectives.

- Our Pledge, Our Voice – Making visible commitments for future action.

Step-by-step facilitation flow

Facilitators can adapt based on age, gender, literacy and local context.

Step 1: Youth mapping and invitations

Map and invite a diverse group of youth, ensuring you include:

- Youth faith leaders (e.g., young imams, youth pastors).
- Informal influencers (e.g., peer educators, artists, social media organizers).
- Faith-based school groups, interfaith youth networks and spiritual circles.

Work through local Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees (MFACCs) or youth faith bodies to build trust. Depending on your context, consider bringing together mixed-gender groups or separating them into groups for girls and boys.

Step 2: Youth dialogue and listening circles

Host gender- and age-appropriate dialogue sessions. Use creative tools like:

- Mural mapping: Invite youth to draw how they see their community now — and what change would look like.
- Faith and me reflections: Prompt with “What does my faith say about protecting girls and boys?”
- Theatre of belief: In small groups, perform short skits showing a challenge and a faith-based response (e.g., a girl refusing marriage, a boy defending his sister).

These tools help surface unspoken narratives and challenge assumptions without direct confrontation.

Step 3: Intergenerational exchange

Invite 1–2 respected elders or faith leaders to participate in a facilitated dialogue.

Suggested flow:

- Youth share reflections (anonymous if needed) from their groups.
- Faith leader responds with scripture, affirmation and openness.
- Open space for respectful questions:
 - What do you believe faith asks of us on this issue?

- How can young people and elders walk together to protect children?

This can be followed by quiet reflection or anonymous writing.

Step 4: Co-design youth roles

Ask youth what roles they would like to play in ending harmful practices. Emphasize flexibility and ownership.

Examples of co-created roles:

- **Peer educators:** leading small group discussions in youth or faith settings.
- **Faith messengers:** delivering short scriptural reflections in youth fellowships or religious schools.
- **Digital campaigners:** designing social media posts, faith-based reels or audio spots.
- **Prayer or reflection circle hosts:** organizing faith-aligned events that centre protection and dignity.
- **Speaking out:** denouncing harmful practices and alerting relevant organizations when they happen.

Allow youth to propose roles aligned with their strengths and interests, then help connect them to opportunities during implementation.

Step 5: Create youth messaging prototypes

Youth work in small groups to develop 2–3 faith-aligned messages or campaign ideas.

These can be:

- Slogans or affirmations (‘my faith protects — not harms’).
- Short spoken word pieces.
- Posters or sticker concepts.
- Video or reel scripts.

Test messages in peer groups, invite feedback and refine tone, visuals and language. Use questions like:

- Does this speak to you as a young person of faith?
- Would this be shared or ignored in your WhatsApp group?
- Does it feel true to your religion and your reality?
- How can it be improved?

Step 6: Youth pledge and follow-up

End with a youth pledge: a simple personal or group commitment.

Options include:

- Signing or writing on a community ‘wall of commitment’.
- Recording a one-sentence audio pledge.
- Creating group prayer or reflection statements.

- Sharing a joint message during Friday prayers, youth fellowship or interfaith dialogue.
- Setting up a youth surveillance group aimed at detecting cases at risk of harmful practices and committing to alerting the relevant authorities/organizations.

Collect contact information (with consent) for follow-up through peer clubs, WhatsApp groups or MFACC youth arms.

Faith-aligned youth message brainstorming

You can use this format during creative sessions to guide the development of campaign messages, posters, slogans or audio scripts.

Message topic

Faith value or verse

Target audience

Platform (poster, radio, Instagram, etc.)

Main message or slogan

Call to action

What is the benefit for the target audience to engage in the call to action?

Visual or audio elements

TOOL 9 — Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committee (MFACC) framework

The content of this tool is adapted directly from the [Faith for Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities Programme Guidance](#), developed by UNICEF, Religions for Peace and the Joint Learning Initiative (2021) and is created for existing Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees

(MFACC). Please use this tool if MFACCs are in place as it outlines the structure, purpose and functioning of MFACCs to support coordinated, faith-led action on child protection and community engagement.

Contextual note on MFACCs and local adaptation

The Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committee (MFACC) is not meant to be a new or heavy structure that small local faith organizations must create. It is introduced later in the FPCC process, after trust has been built, faith actors have come together around shared values, and there is a clear interest in working together in a more organized way. At this stage, faith groups may already be taking action in their communities, and the MFACC provides a way to coordinate these efforts, share learning, and plan together with support from partners like UNICEF or national interfaith councils.

The MFACC is flexible and should be shaped by the local context. In some countries, it might be a small group linked to an religious council or task force; in others, it could grow into a larger platform. It is always meant to be voluntary, locally led, and spiritually rooted, never something imposed from the outside. The goal is to support stronger collaboration between faith actors and development partners in ways that reflect FPCC values of co-creation, inclusion, and community leadership.

Section 1: Purpose and role

The proposed structure can be called a MFACC.

MFACC is a mechanism to support coordination between UNICEF (and subsequently other development partners) and country-level faith communities (including interreligious councils, religious leaders, and local/national faith-based organizations) on setting joint priorities for children, families and communities, as well as to ensure that an agenda for action is jointly developed, resourced and monitored.

A national MFACC serves as a country-level, voluntary entity to support more effective, efficient and inclusive interfaith engagement on jointly defined priorities and actions for families and communities that are locally owned and sustainable.

MFACC provides strategic advice and is a platform for complementarity and collaboration among faith actors, religious leaders and UNICEF. It will be responsible for the development, coordination and reporting of partnership activities and joint plans of action.

Ultimately, to serve the wider development and humanitarian agenda, the aim is that in the long term, each MFACC will serve as a national interreligious advisory body for the overarching United Nations country programme and other development partner agendas.

It is vital that this proposed committee is linked to other national committees around children and community engagement (e.g., those for Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) during emergencies, Violence Against Children, Early Childhood Development, etc.).

Section 2: Composition and selection process

MFACCs are proposed as voluntary, inclusive coordination platforms, composed of members drawn from:

- National interreligious councils.
- Recognized religious authorities or national faith-based organizations (FBOs).
- Representatives of grass roots women's and youth faith groups.
- Interfaith networks with active community-level presence.

The selection of MFACC members should be guided by the following principles:

- **Inclusivity:** ensure balanced representation across religions, denominations and traditions.
- **Local legitimacy:** include religious leaders and institutions with recognized community trust and reach.
- **Gender and age balance:** prioritize the inclusion of women faith actors, youth leaders and intergenerational representation.
- **Technical and programmatic value added:** include those with experience in areas such as child protection, health, education and social behaviour change.

Members are nominated by faith communities themselves (not selected externally) and confirmed through a transparent, consensus-based process. Where possible, terms should rotate every 1–2 years to encourage wider participation and sustainability.

Section 3: Roles and responsibilities

The MFACC will serve both strategic and operational functions in the coordination of faith-based engagement on children's rights and the abandonment of harmful practices.

Key responsibilities include:

- **Strategic planning:** contribute to the design of national and subnational strategies to address harmful practices, leveraging faith-based insights and priorities.
- **Action planning:** co-develop joint action plans with partners, outlining faith-led, community-based interventions and mobilizations.
- **Monitoring and learning:** facilitate participatory monitoring of faith engagement activities, documenting lessons learned, good practices and challenges across religious and regional contexts.
- **Resource mobilization:** contribute to the identification of funding opportunities and faith actor resource sharing to support coordinated efforts.
- **Crisis/emergency response:** serve as a faith coordination body during health or humanitarian emergencies (e.g., coordinating spiritual response during pandemics, child protection in displacement settings).
- **Bridge-building:** act as a link between formal national systems and informal spiritual and community care systems, ensuring mutual reinforcement and coordination.

These roles may be adapted based on country priorities, existing structures and evolving faith engagement strategies.

Section 4: Operating modalities and structure

The MFACC should be structured to ensure accountability, sustainability and active participation across religious communities and technical sectors. Its operating modalities must be inclusive, adaptable and anchored in local systems.

Suggested structure:

- **Chair:** rotating every 12–24 months among faith traditions (e.g., Muslim, Christian, Indigenous) and selected by consensus among members.
- **Secretariat or coordination focal point:** responsible for scheduling meetings, documentation, communication with UNICEF and partners, and tracking progress.
- **Subcommittees or working groups:** depending on size, thematic or regional groups may be formed, such as:
 - Training and capacity-building.
 - Policy and advocacy.
 - Youth engagement.
 - Faith and child protection messaging.
 - Monitoring, learning and accountability.

Meeting modalities:

- **Frequency:** regular meetings (e.g., monthly or quarterly), with additional emergency sessions as needed.
- **Format:** hybrid where possible — in-person and virtual — to ensure geographic reach and inclusion.
- **Agenda setting:** jointly set by the Chair and secretariat, with space for rotating member proposals.
- **Reporting:** meeting minutes, key action points and follow-ups should be shared among all members and key partners.

Where a national interfaith council already exists, the MFACC should be embedded within it or developed in close coordination to avoid duplication and strengthen legitimacy.

Section 5: Links with national systems and sustainability

MFACCs should not operate in isolation. They must be linked to relevant national and local systems to ensure their work supports and complements broader child protection and community engagement efforts.

A. National coordination and alignment

- Link MFACC representatives with national child protection coordination structures, such as:
 - Ministries of Gender, Children or Social Welfare.
 - National task forces on harmful practices, FGM or child marriage.
 - Inter-agency technical working groups (e.g., on Risk Communication and Community Engagement -RCCE - or behaviour change).
- Participate in national planning or monitoring exercises, such as:
 - Annual sector reviews.
 - Policy consultation forums.
 - Joint programme reviews with United Nations agencies or government.

B. Sustainability and local ownership

- Ensure that MFACCs are faith-led but jointly supported by UNICEF and other development partners as needed, to avoid dependency
- Encourage:
 - Resource sharing among faith institutions (e.g., meeting space, communications).
 - Integration into existing faith structures (e.g., women's leagues, theological colleges).
 - Rotation of leadership and gradual decentralization (regional MFACCs).

The MFACC should evolve into a self-sustaining interreligious advisory body that plays a leadership role in shaping national discourse and supporting community resilience.

TOOL 10 - Faith-led policy advocacy toolkit

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy in policy advocacy

Advocacy often involves sharing stories or testimonies. While these can be powerful, they must always be used in ways that protect dignity and prevent harm.

Before advocacy activities

- Prepare faith leaders and partners on safeguarding standards.
- When using personal stories, obtain written consent. Do not use real names, photos or details that could identify individuals without explicit permission.
- Ensure survivors and youth speakers are supported and not pressured to share.
- Review advocacy materials (briefs, declarations, media) to remove identifying details.

During advocacy activities

- Do not disclose names or personal information when presenting cases in policy spaces.
- Frame stories around shared values and lessons, not individuals.
- Ensure that survivor voices, if included, are supported, voluntary and presented with care.
- Maintain respectful dialogue, avoiding political or religious divisions.

After advocacy activities

- Keep records secure and anonymized.
- Follow up with any survivors, youth or community members who contributed stories to ensure their well-being.
- Monitor public responses to advocacy messages to ensure no harm comes to those associated with them.
- Key reminder: Advocacy must never put survivors, children or communities at risk. Protecting dignity, privacy and well-being is as important as influencing policy change.

This toolkit equips faith leaders and advocacy allies with structured guidance on how to engage in formal policy processes, influence public systems, and align faith values with legal and institutional reforms to end harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. Faith actors are powerful moral voices; this tool helps them engage respectfully and effectively in policy spaces.

Objectives

- Equip faith leaders with advocacy and policy engagement skills.
- Align scripture with national and customary legal frameworks.
- Strengthen interfaith collaboration in public policy spaces.
- Support coordinated messaging and action through declarations and policy briefs.

Who this is for

This tool is intended for faith actors engaged in national and local advocacy, representatives from Multi-Faith Ac-

tion Coordination Committees (MFACC), interfaith coalitions, programme implementers and development or legal partners seeking to amplify the voices of faith leaders in public policy reform.

Toolkit structure

- Why faith actors matter in policy.
- Mapping the policy landscape.
- Aligning faith messaging with legal frameworks.
- Advocacy dos and don'ts for faith leaders.
- Tools for policy engagement.

Section 1: Why faith actors matter in policy

Faith leaders hold a unique position of trust and influence in society. They shape not only personal beliefs but also public discourse and community practices. In many contexts, they are consulted during legislative processes, mediate local disputes and participate in community-level governance.

Why this matters for policy advocacy:

- **Moral legitimacy:** Faith leaders can frame child protection and gender justice as moral imperatives, not just legal mandates.
- **Access to decision makers:** Religious councils, national interfaith networks and denominational structures often have links to lawmakers.
- **Public influence:** Sermons, pastoral letters and public prayer events can influence broader public opinion and shape what is considered politically acceptable.

“We are not just spiritual guides—we are stewards of the community’s conscience. When we speak, people listen. That voice must be used wisely.”

— Pastor, Nigeria (Religions for Peace Dialogue)

Section 2: Mapping the policy landscape

Before faith actors can engage effectively in policy advocacy, they need to understand how decisions are made, who holds influence and where they can enter the conversation. This section provides a step-by-step approach to mapping the legal and policy environment surrounding FGM and child marriage.

A. Understand the formal system

Map key national and local institutions responsible for:

- Child protection and legal enforcement (e.g., Ministry of Gender, Justice, Health).

- Parliamentary committees on youth, women, social development or religion.
- Law reform commissions or customary law councils.
- Independent bodies (e.g., human rights commissions, national ethics boards).

How faith leaders can engage:

- Attend public consultations or legislative hearings.
- Request meetings with MPs or ministry focal points.
- Contribute to national development plans or SDG reviews.
- Serve on advisory boards or thematic working groups.

B. Identify customary and religious structures

In many settings, community-based justice systems (e.g., elders’ councils, sharia courts, religious arbitration bodies) coexist with formal legal structures. These bodies often:

- Mediate marriage disputes or dowry arrangements.
- Handle early pregnancy and school dropout cases to ensure the girl’s rights are upheld and she continues her education.
- Influence enforcement of harmful practices or alternatives.

Tip: Work with religious councils and interfaith bodies to understand how these systems work—and where harmful norms are upheld or challenged.

C. Use a policy-mapping template

Encourage faith leaders or partners to fill in a simple mapping table:

Level	Institution / actor	Entry point	Existing link?	Faith role?
National	Ministry of Gender	National child marriage strategy	No	Possible
Local	County Religious Leaders Forum	Annual interfaith peace declaration	Yes	Active
Customary	Elders’ Court (Local Name)	Dispute mediation over school refusal	No	Potential
Religious law	Islamic Religious Authority	Fatwa Council on FGM	Yes	Endorsement

This helps faith actors prepare targeted engagement, assess gaps and plan strategic alliances.

Section 3: Aligning faith messaging with legal frameworks

To advocate effectively, faith leaders must be able to connect their religious teachings with national and inter-

national legal protections. This builds credibility, bridges perceived contradictions between law and faith and strengthens messaging on ending harmful practices.

A. Theological-legal framing

Objective: Help faith leaders present messages that are both scripturally grounded and rights-affirming.

Example format:

Legal principle	Faith reference	Shared value
Age of marriage: 18+	Qur'an 4:6 – "Test the orphans until they reach maturity"	Maturity, responsibility
Protection from violence and harm	Bible: Matthew 18:6 – "If anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble..."	Protection, accountability
Bodily integrity and consent	Qur'an 17:70 – "We have honoured the children of Adam"	Dignity, sanctity of life
Right to education	Proverbs 22:6 – "Train up a child in the way he should go..."	Growth, opportunity

Use these as talking points in policy briefs, public engagements and faith declarations.

B. Scriptural arguments for policy change

Train faith leaders to:

- Cite scripture when advocating for alignment of national laws with protection standards.
- Publicly affirm existing legal protections in sermons or media interviews.
- Frame harmful practices as violations of both religious ethics and national law.

"Our religion commands protection. The law enforces it. Together, we fulfil both divine and civic responsibility."

C. Develop interfaith declarations

Support MFACCs or interfaith groups to issue joint statements that:

- Affirm legal protections (age of marriage, child safeguarding).
- Cite shared values across traditions (justice, dignity, mercy).
- Call on governments to enforce child protection frameworks.

These can be delivered at parliamentary hearings, national prayer breakfasts or as part of United Nations advocacy weeks.

Section 4: Advocacy dos and don'ts for faith leaders

Faith leaders are trusted voices, but engaging in policy spaces requires care, clarity and ethical discipline. This section provides concrete guidance on how to advocate with impact while respecting political, legal and interfaith sensitivities.

• What faith leaders should do

- **Speak from scripture and values, not political partisanship.** Frame advocacy as a moral and spiritual responsibility: protecting life, honouring dignity, preventing harm.
- **Centre survivor and youth voices.** Invite lived experiences into faith spaces. Use sermons, testimonies or roundtables to lift up the people most affected.
- **Work with—not against—legal frameworks.** Promote national laws that align with religious values of protection and justice. Clarify that law and faith can support one another.
- **Collaborate across faiths.** Where possible, speak as an interfaith coalition. Joint statements carry more legitimacy and are harder to dismiss.
- **Engage respectfully with institutions.** Use proper channels. Request formal meetings. Write respectful letters. Praise positive steps before proposing changes.
- **Seek training in public communication.** Equip yourself with skills in messaging, conflict resolution and media engagement. Practice responding to tough questions calmly.

• What to avoid in advocacy

- **Don't use divisive religious rhetoric.** Avoid language that implies one faith 'owns' morality or protection. Avoid sectarian comparisons.
- **Don't speak beyond your mandate.** Stick to religious and ethical framing. Do not promise legal outcomes or misrepresent your institution's position.
- **Don't politicize the pulpit.** Don't turn houses of worship into campaign platforms. Keep the message grounded in protection, not party lines.
- **Don't ignore resistance or pushback.** Prepare for theological, cultural or political resistance. Acknowledge it and respond with compassion and facts.
- **Don't act alone on controversial issues.** Engage with your network, MFACC or interfaith council before issuing bold public statements. Be part of a collective voice.

- **Do not share identifying information about cases.** Although lived experiences can make advocacy cases more compelling, never use any identifying details that may link the case with the person in question, unless you have received permission from the person to share their story.

A. Advocacy brief template

Use this for meetings with government officials, parliamentarians, task forces or development partners.

Template Includes:

- Title and faith body name.
- Key message: 1–2 paragraphs framing the issue as a moral and legal concern.
- Scriptural framing: 1–2 key verses (Qur'an, Bible, Indigenous text).
- Policy ask: what change or action is being requested (e.g., enforcement, budget, reform).
- Closing: Offer for collaboration, contact details.

Example Title: *"Faith Leaders Call for the Full Implementation of the Child Marriage Act".*

Faith Reference: *"The Prophet said: 'Whoever does not show mercy to our young... is not one of us.'" (Hadith).*

Ask: *"We urge the Ministry to allocate dedicated resources to enforce the national age of marriage law in rural countries."*

B. Interfaith policy declarations

Used during public forums, policy launches, prayer break-fasts or national dialogue days.

Structure:

- Shared introduction on the value of protecting children.
- 2–3 theological principles all signatories affirm.
- Specific commitment or call to action (e.g., support to survivors, policy implementation).
- Signatories (individual or institutional).

Attach as annex to policy meetings or use as talking points in media appearances.

C. Public positioning tools

Use these in tandem with the digital advocacy toolkit (Tool 10):

- **Joint op-eds:** "Why our faiths reject child marriage".
- **Faith radio segments:** invite interfaith guests, survivors and lawmakers.
- **Community dialogues:** Use declaration excerpts to anchor conversations.

D. Parliamentary hearing preparation tips

If invited to present to a government committee or hearing:

- Practise a three-minute moral framing with scriptural and legal hooks.
- Focus on values, not emotions or accusations.
- Bring written briefs and joint statements for distribution.
- Follow up with a thank-you letter and meeting request.

TOOL 11 - Digital Advocacy and Myth-Busting Guide

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy in digital activities

Digital advocacy can reach wide audiences but also carries risks.

Before going online

- Use only official or trusted accounts and never personal profiles for group facilitation.
- Obtain informed consent from participants before adding them to WhatsApp groups or online forums.
- Share ground rules: respect, no harmful content, no sharing outside the group.
- Protect privacy: do not post names, photos, voice notes or videos without permission.

During online activities

- Moderate all groups to prevent harmful, offensive or exploitative content.
- Remind participants not to share others' stories without consent.
- Avoid asking for sensitive personal details (e.g., health status, location, family history).
- If a safeguarding concern is raised in a chat or message, respond respectfully and follow agreed referral pathways.

After activities

- Keep digital records secure and delete identifying information unless explicit consent is given to retain it.
- Do not forward participant messages, photos or audio beyond the agreed group.
- Share findings and testimonies only in anonymized, aggregated form.
- Follow up only through safe and agreed communication channels.

Key reminder: Safeguarding applies equally online and offline. Protect participants' dignity, safety and privacy at all times.

In many communities, mobile phones and messaging apps like WhatsApp have become powerful tools for connection, learning and community dialogue. Faith actors and youth leaders can harness these tools to continue conversations that begin in mosques, churches, schools and storytelling circles; ensuring that messages challenging female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage remain visible, relatable and rooted in scripture.

These digital strategies - bringing together mind, heart and faith, work best when they are simple, consistent and integrated into daily life. They allow community members to engage at their own pace, in their own language and in private or group settings, making them especially useful for reaching men, young people and individuals who may not speak up in public forums.

1. WhatsApp story and sermon campaign

A daily or weekly WhatsApp campaign can be launched where short, real-life but anonymized stories, paired with a faith-based reflection or mini-sermon – are shared with participants through broadcast lists or group messages.

Each message can include:

- An anonymous personal story or quote (from a survivor, parent, youth, or faith leader) about having stood up against a harmful practice.
- A scriptural reflection or verse linked to the story (e.g., on dignity, mercy or protection).
- A short, encouraging call to action.

This format helps humanize the issue and link it directly to faith teachings. Messages can be voice notes, short texts or images. Local youth or faith leaders can rotate responsibilities in curating and sending content.

2. Faith-based WhatsApp discussion groups

To keep conversations going beyond public events or sermons, dedicated WhatsApp groups can be formed around topics like child marriage, faith and parenting or youth leadership. These groups provide a private, moderated space for ongoing dialogue. Moderators, preferably trained faith leaders or youth facilitators, can post weekly prompts, share relevant scripture and offer responses to

common questions or myths. These groups also allow for peer support and sharing of testimonies, helping to build a sense of collective responsibility. Such groups are especially useful for reaching men and youth who may be more active online than in traditional community discussions.

3. Engaging local faith influencers

Beyond WhatsApp groups and visual materials, identifying and engaging trusted social media influencers can help amplify faith-based messages in relatable and persuasive ways.

These influencers might include:

- Popular pastors, imams or youth preachers.
- Faith-based musicians, spoken word artists or local media presenters.
- Women leaders, teachers, midwives or madrasa instructors with a strong presence in the community.

They can be invited to:

- Share testimonies or key messages on their platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, radio).
- Host Q&A sessions or join WhatsApp discussions.
- Share simple videos linking scripture to dignity, consent and protection.

Partnering with influencers helps normalize positive messaging and makes it more likely to be seen, shared and accepted; especially among young people. Their language, tone and style can be adapted to local context while remaining anchored in core values.

Tools for addressing misinformation and myth-busting through faith-based facts

Misinformation about FGM and child marriage is widespread and often cloaked in religious justification. To counter this, communities can create clear, accessible materials and activities that dispel harmful myths using scripture, personal testimonies and practical knowledge.

Myth-buster pamphlets and visual aids

Visually engaging posters, leaflets and cards can be developed with key 'myth versus fact' messages. These should address common misconceptions—for example:

- **FGM is required by Islam:** False; there is no verse in the Qur'an mandating FGM. The Qur'an says: *"Do not harm yourself or others."*
- **Child marriage is in the Bible:** Misunderstood; the Bible teaches marriage based on love, maturity and mutual consent.

Materials could be distributed after sermons, storytelling sessions, school events, and women or youth meetings, and displayed in high-traffic areas like mosques, churches, health centres, markets or bus stations.

Faith-based myth-busting quizzes

Interactive quizzes, delivered in workshops, WhatsApp groups or youth gatherings can help participants test their understanding and reflect on what is real, what is misinterpreted and what faith truly says.

Example format:

- "True or False: The Prophet Muhammad instructed FGM" (False).
- "Which of these verses encourages harm?" (None).

Quizzes make learning participatory and often spark lively discussion, helping correct misinformation in a non-confrontational way.

Social media myth-busting (especially Instagram)

A myth-busting campaign can also run on social media using short posts or stories particularly on platforms like Instagram, where visuals are key.

Each post can feature:

- A common myth ('FGM keeps girls pure') – A scriptural or faith-based truth in response.
- A quote or testimony – A clear, shareable design (ideal for youth to repost).

TOOL 12 - Reflect-act-reflect (R-A-R) accountability tool

Safeguarding, confidentiality and privacy in reflection spaces

The R-A-R tool encourages honest dialogue and collective learning.

Before a reflection session

- Choose a safe, private and accessible space where people feel comfortable.
- Explain the purpose of the session: learning and improvement, not blame.
- Remind participants that sharing is voluntary, and they can leave or skip questions. Be aware of power dynamics that may oblige individuals to engage in the activity against their will.
- Ensure diverse voices (youth, women, elders) are invited in ways that respect dignity.

During the session

- Encourage participants to share experiences as relevant, without naming individuals.
- Do not pressure anyone to disclose personal stories.
- Listen respectfully if concerns arise, but do not press for details of abuse or violence.
- If a safeguarding concern is shared, stop and follow agreed referral pathways.
- Keep the focus on collective learning, not individual fault.

After the session

- Keep notes anonymous: no names or identifying details.
- Store reflection forms securely.
- Share insights only in aggregated form (themes, lessons, next steps).
- Follow up promptly on any safeguarding issues raised.
- Reflect with your team on how to improve safe, inclusive facilitation.

Reminder: Reflection must never cause harm. Safeguarding means creating an environment of trust, respect and dignity where all voices can be heard safely.

This tool supports faith leaders, Multi-Faith Action Coordination Committees (MFACCs), and community actors to regularly reflect on what is changing, how messages and practices are being received, and what adaptations are needed. It promotes real-time learning, rooted in faith values and local realities.

Who can use it?

- Faith leaders (individually or in small peer groups).
- MFACC committees and interfaith platforms.

- Youth or women's faith groups.
- Programme staff and implementing partners.
- Any group facilitating dialogue or leading activities.

When to use it

- At regular intervals (e.g., monthly or quarterly).
- After a major event or sermon series.
- Following visible pushback or resistance.
- Before adapting a tool or rolling out a new activity.
- As part of a routine team reflection.

How It Works: The R-A-R Cycle

Step	Guiding questions	Suggested format
1. Reflect	What have we done? What worked well? What concerns were raised? How did the community respond? Were any groups of people excluded? What surprised us?	• Use storytelling, scripture or shared testimony to open. • Allow all voices to speak (use small groups if needed). • Take notes (voice memos or flipcharts).
2. Act	What will we keep doing? What needs to change or be paused? Who needs support? What messages or tools should be revised?	• Prioritize 1–2 concrete actions • Use checklists or action plans • Assign responsibilities and timelines
3. Reflect (Again)	Did our changes make a difference? How do we know? What did we learn this time? What will we do next?	• Use before the next cycle or after action is implemented • Compare notes from past reflections • Celebrate small wins and identify new gaps

Preparation checklist

- Invite participants in advance and set a safe, familiar location.
- Bring flipcharts, markers or printed copies of the R-A-R Reflection Form.
- Open with a spiritual reflection, prayer or faith value that connects to the theme.
- Clarify the purpose: “This is about reflecting together and learning—not blame or reporting.”

Step-by-step facilitation

1. Reflect

Goal: Understand what happened and how it was received

Ask:

- What activities or messages have we delivered since our last meeting?
- How did the community respond, positively, negatively or with silence?
- What surprised us?
- Were there any signs of resistance or misunderstanding?

Method: Group discussion, small circles, storytelling, or visuals

Tips: Let different voices speak—faith leaders, youth, women, elders

2. Act

Goal: Decide what to do based on reflection

Ask:

- What should we continue, stop or change?
- Are there groups we overlooked or misread?
- What support do we need from others, from scripture, from training?
- What specific actions will we take before our next meeting?

Method: Use a board or form to track action points and responsibilities.

Tips: Focus on 1–3 changes or next steps, not too many

3. Reflect (again)

Goal: Come back to see what has changed

Ask:

- What was done since the last time?
- Did anything improve? Did resistance grow?
- What have we learned that we didn’t know before?
- Are we moving in line with our values and goals?

Method: Return to the form, compare notes, share stories or feedback

Tips: Close with scripture, prayer or commitment to action

R-A-R reflection for

Facilitator/Group name: _____

Date: _____

Session type (circle): MFACC / Youth group / Faith leader circle / Women's group / Other: _____

1. Reflect

a. What activities or messages were implemented recently?

b. What was the community response? (Include signs of support, concern or silence)

c. Which groups of people were engaged? Which ones were less engagement/less vocal?

d. What surprised us or challenged our expectations?

2. Act

a. What should we do differently or continue doing?

b. What action(s) will we take before the next session?

c. Who is responsible for each action? By when?

Action	Responsible person(s)	Deadline

3. Reflect (again)

To be completed during the next session

a. What actions were taken?

b. What changed—positively or negatively?

c. What did we learn?

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