

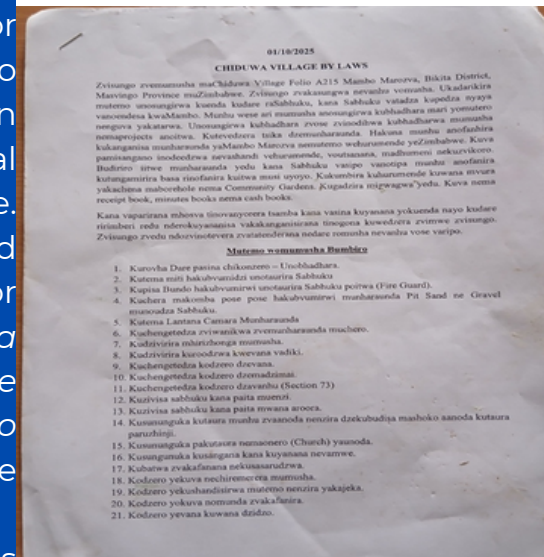
STORY OF CHANGE

LOCAL OWNERSHIP IN PREVENTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN
BIKITA DISTRICT

One of the most significant changes witnessed during the reporting period has been the growing commitment of communities to develop and adopt their own by-laws to prevent violence against women and girls. Before the intervention, cases of gender-based violence were often regarded as private family matters, with limited community action to protect survivors or hold perpetrators accountable. Harmful cultural norms and unequal power relations continued to fuel violence and discrimination against women and girls.

Through the ICSP project, UDACIZA engaged community activists, traditional and religious leaders in a series of capacity-building sessions that emphasized the importance of community-led initiatives in preventing violence. Equipped with new knowledge and facilitation skills, the leaders mobilised community members to participate in open dialogues on gender equality, power and the need for community by-laws that promote safety and respect for all. These discussions were inclusive allowing women, men, young people, religious and traditional leaders to contribute to the development of the by-laws. As a result, thirty-three villages in all the four wards of operation successfully adopted by-laws that condemn violence against women and girls, discourage harmful cultural practices, promote peaceful conflict resolution and strengthen accountability for those who commit acts of violence. Several villages are in the final stages of validating and adopting their by-laws as they await the Chiefs approval and stamping. The community members appreciated that initiative as they mentioned that the by-laws will be for everyone even the village heads need to be accountable. One villager in ward 13 expressed that, *“mitemo iyi ichaita kuti munhu wese ave ziso remusha wedu, anenge atyora mitemo iyi achabatwa nemhosva, zvichaitawo kuti tigare murumyararo tichiremekedzana.”* (These by-laws will make everyone responsible for our community. Anyone who violates these by-laws will be held accountable and they will help us live together in peace, respecting one another.)

Communities are increasingly taking ownership of protecting women and girls and creating safer environments where violence is no longer tolerated. This locally driven initiative demonstrates the sustainability of the project, as communities continue to champion positive social norms and uphold values of dignity, equality and mutual respect beyond the life of the project.



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