

JAN-JUN 2026

UDACIZA

NEWSLETTER

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**SASA! FAITH SUPPORT PHASE TRAINING**

In March and April 2026 the project trained 42 CAs, 20 RLs, 34 TLs and 48 duty bearers on the SASA! Faith Support Phase. The training helped them lead support discussions, include safeguarding messages in sermons, set up protection/support structures in and outside faith spaces and guide survivors to services through the GBV referral pathway. After the training these cadres put their knowledge into practice by strengthening community protection systems, improving referrals and encouraging lasting change in social norms.



CAs during SASA! Faith Support Phase training

COMMUNITY BY-LAWS

UDACIZA through the project has facilitated the development of gender sensitive community by laws in 15 villages. The community by laws are set enforceable of rules and procedures that guide conduct and relations of community members and from previous UDACIZA dialogues using the SASA!Faith model revealed that existing by laws are adding to structural violence faced by women and girls in Bikita. With assistance of trained CAs, RLs and TLs who- have carried out downstream community dialogues, communities have reflected on developing locally owned by-laws addressing domestic violence, child marriage, drug and substance abuse and other harmful practices. To date, 15 village heads have drafted by-laws awaiting approval by the Chief while other villages have begun developing their own demonstrating growing commitment to sustainable, community-led protection of women and girls

SUMMARY

In the first half of 2026 in Bikita District's wards 13, 19, 21 and 32 the project moved from the awareness stage to the support stage of the SASA! Faith program. This phase focuses on changing harmful gender norms, building support systems for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) & preventing GBV by working with faith communities, religious leaders (RLs), traditional leaders (TLs), community activists (CAs), GBV stakeholders and men as allies for change. By involving women in church and community leadership the project also promotes women's leadership, amplify their voices and strengthens their role in decision making at all levels of the ecological model.

GENDER DESKS

In the first half of the year the project set up 10 gender desks in 24 faith spaces mostly in apostolic churches as part of the SASA! Faith Support Phase. These gender desks give women, men, girls and boys safe and private places to report abuse to trusted people of the same sex and age. This makes it easier for survivors to reach police, health, legal and counseling services. The initiative has built stronger teamwork between RLs and gender desk members, increased community trust in reporting GBV and improved survivor-focused safeguarding and referrals. The approach is lasting with three more faith communities already starting gender desks and more churches asking for safeguarding training

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Women in Church & Community Leadership

Through the influence of 69 women in community and church leadership cohort the project is working with, 33 additional women and adolescent girls were newly elected into leadership roles across faith spaces and other community structures. Women now hold 53% (35 of 66) of leadership positions in targeted structures with most serving in informal roles. The project significantly strengthened women's confidence and influence with participants reporting high levels of impact in decision-making (average scores of 4/5 in formal and 4.12/5 in informal structures). Initiatives such as SASA! Faith sessions, male engagement activities, community dialogues and leadership awareness campaigns have increased community acceptance of women leaders, resulting in stronger support for women's representation and more equitable participation in decision-making. However the socio-cultural barriers continue to restrict women's access to some senior leadership positions.

*Women in church and community leadership FGD session***Male- Engagement Sessions**

The project strengthened male engagement through a structured curriculum that reached 156 men and boys equipping them with knowledge and skills to become allies in preventing VAWG. The sessions improved understanding of positive power, gender equality and healthy relationships built on shared decision-making, respect and cooperation rather than control. Men increasingly recognized that domestic and caregiving responsibilities should be shared and that women's participation in leadership benefits families and communities. Outcome tracking showed that 100% of men engaged believed violence against women is unacceptable while 80% supported equal power sharing in relationships. Religious leaders reinforced these messages through sermons and couples' counselling, while community action followed including the adoption of village by-laws condemning violence against women demonstrating growing ownership of gender equality and peaceful conflict resolution.

*Male Engagement Session***Challenges**

Patriarchal norms and harmful beliefs still block many women from taking part in leadership, decision-making and owning assets like land, homes and livestock. GBV is still common fuelled by harmful gender norms, alcohol and drug abuse, economic abuse and weak law enforcement. Women struggle to reach senior leadership especially in formal spaces, because of cultural inheritance systems and stereotypes that favour men. Economic challenges also hold women back in politics as high costs and unpaid care work limit their ability to campaign. GBV case management is slow especially for child sexual violence cases, where lack of evidence often stops cases from moving forward in court.

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Churches in Zimbabwe Africa**