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Community Activists posing for a photo during Support phase Training captured by Simangaliso Nyamangara

FAITH, POWER AND CHANGE

An Abridged Report on Two Years of SASA! Faith Awareness Phase Implementation in Bikita District (2024–2025)

Partner: UDACIZA, with support from Trócaire Zimbabwe
District: Bikita District — Wards 13, 19, 21 and 32
Period: January 2024 – December 2025
Prepared by: Donna Nyadete

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present this edition of the UDACIZA report which highlights the inspiring journey of the SASA! Faith Project being implemented in Bikita District. This publication celebrates the collective efforts of religious leaders (RLs), Community Activists (CAs), communities, local authorities, and development partners who are working together to build safer, more just and more inclusive communities.

The SASA! Faith approach recognizes the unique influence of faith communities in shaping values, attitudes and behaviors. By engaging RLs and CAs as champions of positive change, the project is helping to transform harmful social norms, strengthen families, promote gender equality and prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG). It demonstrates that faith can be a powerful force for justice, dignity, changing lives and peaceful coexistence.

Throughout this report, readers will encounter stories of hope, resilience and transformation from individuals and communities in Bikita District. This publication highlights the immense impact of partnerships between UDACIZA, Trocaire and Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination (ZHOCD) leaders. Christian communities possess unparalleled reach, moral authority and deep roots within local societies. Testimonies shared in this report remind us that lasting change is possible when faith leaders and community members unite around shared values of love, respect, compassion and mutual accountability.

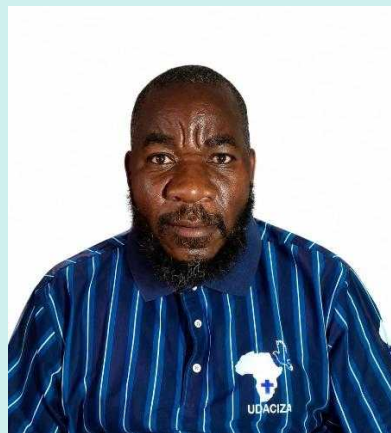
As UDACIZA, we remain committed to empowering faith communities to become catalysts for social norms change, sustainable development, social justice and the protection of the rights and dignity of every person especially targeting women and girls. We are grateful to Trocaire and the Irish Aid for their technical and financial assistance, government departments, traditional leaders, community volunteers and all those whose dedication has contributed to the success of this initiative. It is our hope as UDACIZA that the experiences and lessons captured in this publication will inspire other faith communities to embrace their role in preventing VAWG promoting equality, and strengthening community cohesion.

Together, let us continue to build communities where women, men, girls, and boys live free from violence, discrimination and fear and where faith is reflected through love, justice and service to humanity.

May the love of God continue to inspire and guide the SASA! Faith Project

Rev. Dr. Innocent

UDACIZA General Secretary



Rev Dr I. Chitanda

Introduction

Between January 2024 and December 2025, the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), with support from Trócaire Zimbabwe through the Ireland Civil Society Partnership (ICSP), implemented the SASA! Faith Awareness Phase across Wards 13, 19, 21 and 32 of Bikita District. The programme sought to prevent violence against women and girls by transforming the harmful social norms and unequal power relations that sustain violence within families, faith communities, and society. Building on the foundations established during the Start Phase, the Awareness Phase encouraged individuals and communities to recognise violence as preventable and to reflect on their role in promoting safer, more equitable relationships.

Violence against women and girls remains a significant challenge in Zimbabwe, with women and girls continuing to experience physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse in both private and public spaces. Within many communities, harmful gender norms, unequal decision making, and rigid interpretations of religious and cultural beliefs reinforce discrimination and limit women's participation in leadership and decision making. Faith institutions occupy a unique position within society, influencing values, behaviours, and social expectations. Their involvement is therefore critical in addressing the root causes of violence and promoting positive social change.

Unlike conventional awareness campaigns, SASA! Faith uses faith as an entry point to stimulate critical reflection on power, gender equality, and respectful relationships. The methodology equips Religious Leaders, Faith Teams, Community Activists, Community Action Groups, women leaders, traditional leaders, and local service providers with practical tools to facilitate dialogue and challenge beliefs that perpetuate violence. Through sermons, Bible studies, community discussions, home visits, and other participatory activities, communities are encouraged to examine how power is exercised and how faith can promote dignity, justice, and equality for women and girls.

Over the two-year implementation period, the programme strengthened collaboration between faith communities, local leadership structures, and service providers to create an enabling environment for violence prevention and survivor support. Religious leaders increasingly became advocates for gender equality, community members engaged in open discussions on previously sensitive issues, and local structures strengthened referral pathways for survivors of violence. The programme also fostered greater ownership of violence prevention efforts within Apostolic churches, demonstrating the potential of faith communities to drive lasting social norms change.

This report consolidates the achievements, lessons learned, challenges, and emerging outcomes from two years of implementing the SASA! Faith Awareness Phase in Bikita District. Drawing on programme monitoring data, routine implementation reports, participant reflections, and case studies, the report highlights the progress made towards transforming attitudes and behaviours while identifying opportunities to strengthen future programming. The findings provide evidence of how sustained community mobilisation and faith-based engagement contributed to creating safer, more inclusive communities and laid a strong foundation for the transition into the Support Phase of the SASA! Faith methodology.

Programme Context

Bikita District is characterised by strong faith traditions, predominantly Apostolic churches, alongside deeply rooted patriarchal norms that shape family life, leadership and decision making. Women and girls experience multiple forms of violence, including intimate partner violence, emotional abuse, sexual violence, child marriage and economic abuse. Many of these violations remain hidden because violence is often viewed as a private family matter.

The implementation period was further affected by prolonged drought, economic hardship and increasing drug and substance abuse, all of which heightened household stress and increased the risk of violence. Limited resources among district service providers also affected survivors' access to timely support. While these contextual factors intensified vulnerability, the programme recognised that the root causes of violence lie in unequal power relations and harmful gender norms rather than poverty alone. Faith institutions therefore represented both part of the challenge and a powerful opportunity for transformation.



International Women's Day Commemoration in ward 32 Captured by Simangaliso Nyamangara

Understanding the Awareness Phase

The Awareness Phase is the second stage of the SASA! Faith methodology. Its primary objective is to help communities recognise that violence against women and girls stems from unequal power rather than individual conflict. The phase focuses on increasing knowledge, challenging harmful beliefs and creating safe spaces where community members can reflect on how power is used within relationships, churches and communities.

Power Within Confidence & dignity	Power Over Control & dominance action	Power With Collaboration	Power To Positive action
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Rather than relying on external facilitators, the programme invested in Community Activists, Religious Leaders, Traditional Leaders and Community Action Groups to lead discussions within their own communities. This approach strengthened trust, local ownership and sustainability.

Implementation Journey

Implementation followed a clear progression over the two years. During 2024, the programme focused on introducing SASA! Faith concepts, establishing Community Activists and SASA! Faith Teams, strengthening facilitation skills and creating safe spaces for dialogue.

By 2025, implementation had matured considerably. Religious Leaders were integrating SASA! Faith messages into sermons, Bible studies and marriage counselling. Community Activists had become trusted facilitators and referral agents, while organised diffusion expanded discussions beyond churches into burial societies, savings schemes and village meetings. Women's Leadership initiatives and male engagement sessions deepened reflection on power, masculinity and shared decision making.



Community Action Group Quarterly Meeting Captured by Simangaliso Nyamangara

Key Achievements

81%

Women — strong GBV knowledge

63%

Women — improved response skills

69

Women in new leadership roles

The programme achieved significant progress in strengthening knowledge, shifting attitudes and building community ownership of violence prevention.

Knowledge of violence against women and girls increased substantially. The 2025 Rapid Assessment Survey found that 81% of women demonstrated improved knowledge of violence prevention, gender equality and referral pathways, while 63% demonstrated improved skills to respond to violence. Community discussions also enabled participants to recognise emotional, psychological and economic abuse, behaviours that had previously been normalised within intimate relationships.

Faith leaders emerged as influential champions of change. Churches increasingly incorporated messages on gender equality into sermons and Bible studies, established gender desks and strengthened referral practices. Several Apostolic churches revised their constitutions to allow women to occupy leadership positions previously reserved for men. These institutional changes demonstrate that SASA! Faith contributed not only to individual behaviour change but also to organisational transformation within faith communities.

Women's participation in leadership increased considerably during the implementation period. Sixty-nine women assumed formal and informal leadership positions across churches and community structures. Women reported greater confidence, stronger "Power Within" and increased participation in household and community decision making. Nevertheless, the programme also recognised that meaningful influence remains constrained by domestic responsibilities, educational barriers and persistent patriarchal attitudes.

Engagement with men and boys contributed to gradual shifts in gender norms. Men increasingly recognised violence as harmful and acknowledged women's right to participate in leadership and decision making. Many also reported improvements in communication within relationships. However, beliefs surrounding bride price, sexual consent and women's reproductive autonomy remain areas requiring continued attention.

The programme also strengthened survivor-centred referral systems. Community Activists, Religious Leaders and Traditional Leaders increasingly understood their roles within formal referral pathways, leading to improved collaboration with service providers such as the Zimbabwe Republic Police, Musasa, the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association and the Department of Social Development. Religious Leaders increasingly complemented spiritual support with referrals to specialised services, reflecting a significant shift from previous practice.

Community ownership grew steadily throughout implementation. Community Action Groups identified advocacy priorities including drug and substance abuse, child marriage, weak gender-based violence services and women's exclusion from leadership. Organised diffusion further extended SASA! Faith principles into broader community structures, while neighbouring churches voluntarily requested inclusion after observing positive changes in participating congregations.



Community Activists role playing during Training captured by Simangaliso Nyamangara

Evidence of Change

Programme monitoring, Rapid Assessment Surveys, assessment dialogues and participant reflections indicate that the Awareness Phase contributed to measurable changes across several domains.

Knowledge improved significantly among women, men and community leaders. Women demonstrated strong understanding of violence prevention and referral pathways, while men reported improved understanding of positive power and gender equality. Assessment dialogues also revealed increasing rejection of violence as a private family matter and greater willingness to intervene when abuse occurs.

Behavioural changes began to emerge alongside increased knowledge. Women increasingly approached Community Activists and Religious Leaders for referral information and encouraged other survivors to seek support. Community members demonstrated greater confidence in reporting cases through formal referral pathways rather than relying solely on family mediation.

Institutional changes also became evident. Churches established gender desks, revised constitutions to promote women's leadership and integrated SASA! Faith messages into routine church activities. Religious Leaders increasingly challenged harmful interpretations of scripture that reinforce inequality, demonstrating that faith can become a platform for promoting justice and dignity.

At community level, violence prevention increasingly became viewed as a shared responsibility. Traditional Leaders, Community Activists, Religious Leaders and Community Action Groups strengthened collaboration with district stakeholders, contributing to stronger referral systems and increased advocacy on issues affecting women and girls.

Faith communities increasingly became spaces where violence against women and girls could be openly discussed and survivors could access support.

Good Practices

- Working through trusted Religious Leaders increased acceptance of discussions on VAWG.
- Community-led facilitation strengthened local ownership and trust in SASA! Faith messages.
- Repeated dialogue encouraged participants to question deeply rooted beliefs.
- Organised diffusion extended learning beyond churches into wider community spaces.

Challenges

- Patriarchal norms continue to limit women's meaningful participation in leadership.
- Economic hardship, drought and substance abuse heightened risks of violence.
- Some families still resolve sexual violence through informal compensation.
- Negative attitudes on consent, sexuality and bride price persist among some men.

Lessons Learned

- Faith institutions promote gender equality effectively when leaders engage critically with power and scripture.
- Social norms change requires sustained dialogue, not one-off awareness campaigns.
- Engaging men as partners increases acceptance of gender equality messages.
- Women's leadership requires simultaneous engagement with institutional gatekeepers.

Looking Ahead

The Awareness Phase has established a strong foundation for the Support Phase of SASA! Faith. Communities now possess greater knowledge of violence against women and girls, stronger understanding of positive power, improved referral systems and increasing ownership of violence prevention.

The Support Phase should build on these achievements by strengthening survivor support, deepening behaviour change among men, addressing persistent norms surrounding sexuality and consent, expanding women's meaningful leadership and strengthening organised diffusion beyond participating faith communities.



Male Engagement Session in ward 13 captured by Simangaliso Nyamangara

Conclusion

The implementation of the SASA! Faith Awareness Phase between 2024 and 2025 demonstrates that transforming harmful social norms is a gradual process that requires trusted leadership, continuous dialogue and strong community ownership. Over two years, the programme moved beyond raising awareness to fostering measurable changes in knowledge, attitudes, institutional practices and community relationships.

While significant challenges remain, particularly regarding deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs and structural barriers facing women and girls, the programme has established the relationships, community structures and institutional commitment necessary for sustained social norms change. The progress achieved provides a strong platform for the Support Phase, where communities will build on emerging changes to strengthen survivor support, collective action and long-term prevention of violence against women and girls.

Report prepared by Donna Nyadete, Women Empowerment Advisor, Trócaire

UDACIZA SASA! Faith Awareness Phase, 2024–2025