



Voice and Choice ***Summit 2026***-Change Strategies-Movement Building Category

**South Africa's Inter Faith Action to end Gender Based
Violence:
Transforming Leaders and Communities**



Synopsis– brief overview what this is about

Name	Merrishia Singh Naicker
Designation	Co coordinator of the Faith Leader’s Gender Transformation Programme
Organisation	We Will Speak Out South Africa (WWSOSA) Faith Action Collective
Country	South Africa
Sub Category	Engagement with religious or faith-based leaders
Summary	WWSOSA coordinates the Faith Action Collective, a movement of over 500 members from eight diverse faith traditions. The statement and strategy unites the faith sector in a survivor-informed response to end gender-based violence (GBV) through collective advocacy, the creation of the first-ever Joint Interfaith Statement and GBV Prevention and Mitigation Strategy (2024-2030), and the implementation of transformative training programs and engagements through safety, courage and accountability.



THE JOURNEY TOWARDS A SOUTH AFRICAN INTERFAITH GBV PREVENTION AND MITIGATION STRATEGY 2024-2030



Faith ACTION
to end Gender-Based Violence

**WE WILL
SPEAK OUT SA**
FAITH COMMUNITIES ENDING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



Background(problem, actions, change, evidence)

Context:

- South Africa face persistently high GBV and femicide rates.
- 87% of South Africans report being religious. The faith sector therefore have a huge role to play in preventing GBV at community level which strengthens families, workplace and social stability.
- Yet we acknowledge that Faith Leaders and the Faith Sector at times has been complicit and have condoned Gender Based Violence.
- Our response as diverse people of faith **who speak out,stand up, collaborate, share knowledge,disrupt harmful norms,act decisively with SURVIVORS in the centre to end gender-based violence and femicide**
- The main office is in KZN, Durban, with staff working remotely across **South Africa**. There is additional interest in the strategy from Eswatini, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.

"if 80% of South Africa's population are church goers and 90% of those who actually go to church are women, then my church consists of many, many survivors. But also of perpetrators. How blind am I to the realities of my congregants? What does that mean for my ministry? We have to change our church culture, even if it becomes something different."
-Bishop Nkosinathi Zondi, Truevine Community Church.



Background(problem, actions, change, evidence)

The context or problem addressed:

Elements of various religions have historically hindered GBV prevention through harmful interpretations of sacred texts, traditions and practices.

Women and children are most affected.

- Survivors report that while they seek "sacred, safe space" in faith communities, their spirits are often attacked by **spiritual abuse**—the manipulation of individuals through spiritual authority.

Most important: Survivors Speak

- “Church is the very 1st place we go to. It is a sacred place, a safe place.” Phindile Dlodla
- “When you are abused, your spirit is attacked. That is why we need to go to faith leaders.” Nompilo Gcwensa
 - *Don't tell me to bhekezela!*
- “... the first place I needed to go; the last place I got what I needed”



Background(problem, actions, change, evidence)

The strategy tackles:

- the isolation of faith-based efforts
- the slow filter-down of inclusive gender norms and practices to local congregations,
- the pushback that comes when there is ground up activism for gender justice
- need to recognize and acknowledge **Spiritual Abuse** as a specific form of GBV and call out GBV as a sin.
- **Key objectives**
 - Mobilise the faith sector to break the silence & stigma and respond effectively to GBVF.
 - Mainstream the faith sector's contribution into national GBV mitigation processes.
 - Transform faith institutions into "GBV-competent" spaces through leadership training and policy reform.



The Change:

- A historic achievement where at least eight diverse faith traditions: African Traditional Religion, Bahai, Buddhist, Brahma Kumari's Christians, Hindus, Hare Krishna, Islam, Jewish moved from isolated efforts to a **unified movement**, signing a Joint Statement of Commitment and launching a comprehensive prevention and mitigation 2024-2030 Strategy.
- Process began in 2020; Statement launched Nov 2023; Strategy launched **October 2024 in South Africa with 8 focus area working groups of which 5 are active.**



Change

- Was the change positive or negative? The change has been **positive**, steady, slow and meaningful by creating a platform for mutual learning and accountability.
- Who benefited, and in what way? Survivors, faith leaders, and activists benefit by having access to a supported, capacitated movement. This leads to impact from the family unit to community level.



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**FAITH LEADERS'
GENDER
TRANSFORMATION
PROGRAMME
(FLGTP)**



We need to do church differently.
Bishop Purity Malinga, Presiding Bishop Methodist Church

- **Before:**

There was **no constructive interfaith response** to ending GBV; faith-based work occurred in isolation and sometimes even perpetuated harm through silence or spiritual abuse.

- **Now:**

- Monthly **forum** meetings
- Active **Online Community of Praxis**,
- Eight dedicated **thematic working groups**
- and a formal **consultancy unit** offering training to corporates

“It’s been a loving space... where we see izangoma taking hands with imams and other faith leaders... saying not in our name.” Dr Fikile Vilizaki



Sustainability

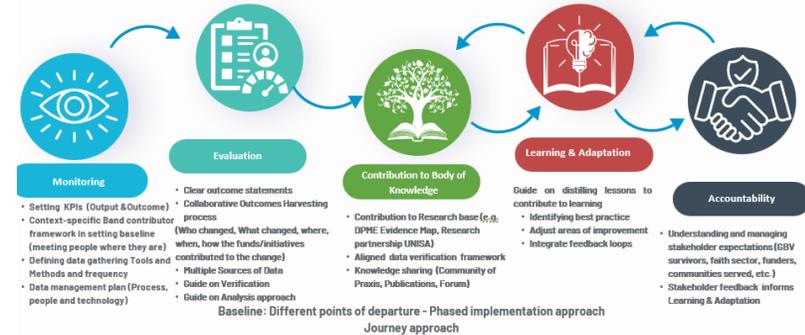
How will the change be sustained or scaled up?

- **Sustainability/Scaling:** The strategy is supported by a **robust M&E (MERLA) framework** to track progress. Scaling includes diversifying the funding base and pursuing **UNISA accreditation** for the Faith Leaders Gender Transformation Programme by 2026.

Fostering a culture of continuous learning and sharing best practices

- **Continuous Learning:** The **Online Community of Praxis** serves as a custom-made space for "living out and practicing" theology, allowing members to share resources, interact socially (similar to LinkedIn), and learn tools to handle "pushback".
- Monthly **forum** meetings with a unlearning/relearning focus. Partner organisations share their profiles and best practices.
- Online **Lunchtime conversations**
- Continuing with the **Faith Leader's Gender Transformation Programme**

FAITH ACTION TO END GBV MERL(A) FOCUS AREAS



<https://interfaithendgbv.org.za/>

Sustainability

- How did you generate and utilise evidence to assess the impact and effectiveness of advocacy efforts within your movement?
- **Evidence & Impact:** WWSOSA utilizes internal and external reviews, as well as **outcomes harvesting**, to assess the effectiveness of its training programmes and engagements.
- The M&E framework specifically guides the collection and translation of data into knowledge to support gender transformation within faith communities.

"It helps me a lot, because I know it is time to speak out and find help... You are my life saver" ~Ouma. Faith Leader survivor from the Women's Survivor retreat



 **WE WILL SPEAK OUT SA**
FAITH COMMUNITIES ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Online Lunchtime Conversation
Transformative Masculinities: faith perspectives
Wednesday 19 Nov @ 12h30-13h45

Stories and experiences in the faith sector of transformative masculinities

Launch of inspiring 16 Days of Activism Campaigns

Series on: How do the Interfaith GBV Strategy and the NSP align?

Challenges & Lessons learnt

Challenges & mitigation

- **Lessons Learnt:** Survivor voices must provide the primary motivation for action. True change requires addressing **power dynamics** and the abuse of spiritual authority.
- **Challenges:** Encountering "pushback" and religious "blind spots".
- **Mitigation:** Establishing an **In-Person Resource Team** to provide bespoke mentorship and trauma debriefing for faith leaders, and developing **sustainability plans** to mitigate external shocks like social unrest or epidemics.



Next Steps

What are your plans?

- Start a **new cohort** for the Faith Leaders Gender Transformation Programme in 2026.
- Achieve full **UNISA accreditation** for training programmes by the end of 2026.
- Advocate for the formal recognition of **spiritual abuse** as a form of GBV in South Africa.
- Expand the movement's reach to neighboring countries including Eswatini, Botswana, and Zimbabwe.



**Statement of
Commitment for
this programme
and for our
ministries going
forward**

Sexual and gender-based violence is unacceptable, inexcusable, and intolerable in all its manifestations.

Yet, we confess that we have sometimes turned a blind eye or tolerated sexual and gender-based violence. We have been collaborators and co-conspirators against the very essence of our creation.

From our platform within local communities, people of faith potentially play a vital role in raising awareness, advocating for survivors' rights and against impunity, holding perpetrators accountable, and challenging harmful gender norms and gender injustices - without fear or favour.

Yet, we confess that we have often been complicit by our silence, our inaction, our misuse of sacred texts and our rigid structures that silence or exclude diversity. Thus we have undermined God's image in all people.

Therefore, we commit to standing up, speaking out and taking decisive action, and to being accountable to survivors, to each other, and to God.