RELIGION, DEVELOPMENT AND GBV:

Recommendations for a Strategic Research Agenda For the PaRD Gender Equality and Empowerment Work-stream

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
Gender Based Violence Learning Hub
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Links

www.jliflc.com

https://gender-based-violence.jliflc.com

http://www.partner-religion-development.org

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Executive summary

Introduction

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) brings together governmental and intergovernmental entities with diverse civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs), to engage the social capital and capacities vested in diverse faith communities for sustainable development and humanitarian assistance in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It aims to bring greater and institutionalised communication and coordination between secular and faith-based actors. PaRD commissioned the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) to provide evidence support to its three work-streams, to strengthen evidence and to inform influential advocacy. The JLI is an international collaboration of academics, practitioners, and policymakers interested in research and evidence on the role of religion in development. PaRD's Gender Equality and Empowerment Work-stream (GEE Work-stream) identified GBV as a key priority, with a focus on ending all forms of violence against and exploitation of women and girls. The report was prepared under the auspices of the [JLI's Gender-based Violence (GBV) Learning Hub](#) and in collaboration with Stellenbosch University's Unit for Religion and Development Research.

> **The purpose of this report is to assist the GEE Work-stream in identifying the specific contributions it can make to assist in remedying the lack of knowledge and evidence on the intersections between religion, development and GBV.**

The report is based on a rapid review of literature, prioritising literature published within the last decade. The outputs of the JLI GBV Learning Hub were crucial to this process. The report also includes case studies. These were sourced from JLI GBV Learning Hub members, JLI GBV Learning Hub literature, and journal articles reviewed for this report.

What do we know?

While the interest in religion and development has grown over the last two decades, research on religion, development and GBV is lagging behind. Reflecting on what existing evidence shows, the influence of patriarchy on many world religions, religious leaders, and religious communities is one of the biggest challenges to faith-based engagement on GBV. Another major challenge is that sex, and sex-related matters, are frequently taboo topics, making it difficult to engage on the issue with religious leaders and religious communities. Religious leaders are a critical dimension of working with religion and religious communities, as they are gatekeepers, especially in religious communities with strict hierarchical structures. Nevertheless, it is important to engage with all levels of religious hierarchies, in both a bottom-up and top-down approach.

Two key approaches are particularly important and effective in addressing GBV with religious leaders and religious communities. The first is a public health approach, where basic public health information pertinent to the issue is shared with religious leaders and/or religious communities. The second approach, a scriptural/theological approach, has been shown to be particularly effective in working with religious leaders and communities.

Where are the gaps?

Empirical work on religion often fails to properly **define religion**. This, in turn, leads to an incorrect operationalisation of the religious variable, for example by using formal religious affiliation as an indicator of an individual's daily religious beliefs and practices, and skews the conclusions drawn by such studies. Much of the research on religion and development is not textured and contextualised enough to adequately deal with the complex multi-dimensionality of religion and how people live their religious beliefs and practices. Overcoming this lack of conceptual clarity will require formative, in-depth research that grapples with and unpacks the complexity of religion within development.

Much of the existing research on religion and development makes **assumptions around causality**. However, one of the key gaps in existing evidence on religion and development is the lack of research that shows the causality of empirical correlations between religious dimensions and developmental dimensions. This reflects the lack of experimental research, and the need for the development of standardised indicators, questions, and measurement scales on religion and GBV.

There appears to be a general **lack of robust monitoring, evaluation and learning** (MEL) of intervention programming. Due to lack of prioritising and/or funding, this step of the intervention process tends to be neglected and findings rarely communicated outside of the implementing organisation. Furthermore, intervention programming is rarely evaluated for the sustainability of its impacts.

Lastly, in existing evidence, there is an **emphasis on certain regions, religions, and issues** related to development and GBV. Existing research is dominated by a focus on Christianity, with very little study of non-Abrahamic religions in relation to GBV. Existing research tends to focus on specific regions, namely Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and the United States of America. It also tends to come from the same organisations and/or programming. Lastly, existing research tends to focus on religious leaders or female, heterosexual GBV survivors. This leaves substantial gaps round understanding religion, development, and GBV as it pertains to other groups e.g. GBV perpetrators, sex workers, and LGBTQI persons.

Where to now?

Partnership is a key component of GBV response, as the multifaceted nature of GBV calls for an integrated, multi-sector, holistic response. Effective partnership in religion, development and GBV is about recognising comparative advantages and working in a coordinated manner to leverage it most effectively. Developing such partnerships and cooperation requires an intentional convening of diverse and unique stakeholders; repeated candid and honest discussion; and identifying a value chain in work, ensuring that each partner is leveraged in its area of comparative advantage and fostering complementarity and equality in the work.

Impactful partnership must avoid viewing partnership as an opportunity to change each other's fundamental actions or beliefs but be open to growing in understanding of each other. The religious leaders included in such networks must be included not only in a token-like manner. At the same time, a diversity of religious voices should be included. Lastly, religious leaders' opinions should not automatically be seen as more moral than others, simply because they are senior within their religious group's hierarchical systems, or because their views are based on religious doctrine. The voices of those in non-formal leadership positions in religious communities should also be included.

Based on existing research on religion, development, and GBV, as well as gaps in the existing literature, the following recommendations are made regarding the development of a research agenda for the PaRD GEE Work-stream:

- **Make a case for research**: Research should be approached as an indispensable tool for figuring out the intersection between religion, development and GBV.
- **Support and promote good research**: This includes methodologically sound research; robust monitoring, evaluation and learning processes connected to faith-based intervention programming; building, developing and strengthening the capacity of local religious actors to understand and use research; and promoting ethical research processes.
- **Promote collaborative partnerships through research**: Partnerships can be strengthened by doing research that identifies the comparative advantage of each actor, and how and when this can be leveraged within the response to GBV. Collaborative research can also, in itself, be a partnership-building activity.
- **Develop a focused research agenda that is informed by current gaps in evidence**: The GEE Work-stream should identify specific activities that are linked to addressing the research gaps identified in the report. Such activities could include:
  - developing a recommended MEL framework and guide for religion and GBV;
  - organising among partners to prioritise evaluations and bring forward evidence from underserved areas;
  - prioritising new research that studies underserved areas;
  - linking with non-faith VAWG researchers and research collaborations to explore possibilities for research collaboration;
  - developing and submitting a large-scale research grant bid, to finance experimental research;
  - identifying key upcoming policy processes for which they can mobilise existing knowledge on religion and GBV to inform decision-making processes; and
  - identifying opportunities for attitude and behaviour change outreach, not only within religious communities about GBV, but also within secular organizations to increase their awareness and knowledge of the nuances of religion and GBV.

Another possible way of ensuring focused and impactful response is to prioritise addressing only one or two gaps, instead of responding to all. For example, should the Work-stream prioritise responding to the gap in robust MEL, activities could include developing a recommended MEL framework and guide for religion and GBV; training local faith community partners on conducting MEL; and funding and organising dissemination events for MEL.

List of acronyms

DFID	UK Department for International Development
FBO	Faith-based Organisation
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
GBV	Gender-based Violence
JLI GBV Hub	JLI Gender-based Violence Hub
GEE Workstream	PaRD Gender Equality and Empowerment Workstream
JLI	Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning
PaRD	International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
VAW	Violence Against Women VAWG Violence Against Women and Girls
WGDS	Washington Group on Disability Statistics

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), a network consisting of governmental and intergovernmental entities, civil society organisations and faith-based organisations (FBOs), aims to bring greater and institutionalised communication and coordination between secular and non-secular actors. Currently focusing their work on three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a separate work-stream devoted to SDG 16, SDG5 and SDG3, PaRD contributes to a more inclusive and effective international agenda on religion and development (PaRD, 2019).

PaRD's Gender Equality and Empowerment Work-stream (GEE Work-stream) focuses on SDG 5 (gender equality and empowerment). The GEE Work-stream identified sexual and gender-based violence[1] as a key priority, with a focus on ending all forms of violence against and exploitation of women and girls. Acknowledging that there is currently a lack of robust research on the intersections between religion, development and gender-based violence (GBV) (Le Roux, 2015; Magner et al, 2015), the GEE Work-stream wishes to identify the specific contributions it can make to assist in remedying this lack of knowledge and evidence.

PaRD commissioned the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) to provide evidence support to its three work-streams, to strengthen evidence and to inform influential advocacy. The JLI is an international collaboration of academic, practitioners, and policymakers interested in research and evidence on the role of religion in development. The report was prepared under the auspices of the JLI's Gender-based Violence Learning Hub, co-chaired by Diana Arango (World Bank Group) and Liz Dartnall (Sexual Violence Research Initiative), with the secretariat led by Prabu Deepan (Tearfund). Dr Le Roux has been a key academic partner since the inception of the Learning Hub.

1.2 Methodology

A rapid literature review was done, prioritising literature published within the last decade. Since its inception in 2014, the Gender-based Violence Hub (GBV Hub) of the Joint Learning Initiative on Local and Faith Communities (JLI) has done a number of scoping studies, reviews, policy briefs and research projects on GBV, development, and religion.[2] These outputs were used as the starting point of the literature review – including review of the bibliographies of the outputs. Furthermore, searches were also conducted using Google Scholar, as this search engine includes grey literature. Search terms included GBV, SGBV, VAWG, and VAW in combination with development and religion or faith. The first 100 hits of each search were reviewed. In total 62 journal articles, research reports and policy briefs were reviewed.

The report also includes case studies. These were sourced from JLI GBV Hub members, JLI GBV Hub literature, and journal articles reviewed for this report.

1.3 Format of report

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[1] The GEE Work-stream uses the term 'sexual and gender-based violence'. However, for the purposes of this report 'gender-based violence' will be the preferred term, to emphasise that no false hierarchy in types of violence is proposed and that gender-based violence is an umbrella term for all forms of violence against women driven by gender inequality (of which sexual violence is one form).

[2] See https://gender-based-violence.jliflc.com/

The report is structured around two main sections:

In the first section the report offers an overview of the existing knowledge and evidence base on religion, development and GBV. This is followed by a discussion of the gaps in evidence and why these gaps exist.

The second section asks, 'Where to now?' The need for, and power of, collaborative, multi-sectoral partnership is discussed, followed by a proposed agenda for the PaRD GEE Work-stream.

At the end of the report is a bibliography of referenced literature. Where possible, hyperlinks are provided.

2. Religion, development and GBV

2.1 Introduction

Prior to 2000, religion and development was a neglected field within development studies, with some rejecting it as a valid field of study (Tomalin, 2013; Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; Jones & Petersen; Swart & Nell, 2016; Ver Beek, 2000). However, since then there has been a remarkable increase in interest, research and writing on the issue:

> *In fact, some would even say that it has become overly fashionable to talk about religion in development. Religion is on the agenda of the major donors and NGOs, and an increasing number of researchers have taken up the topic, witnessed by the growing numbers of conferences, seminars, articles, reports and books dealing with religion and development (Jones & Petersen, 2011: 1292).*

This change is generally accredited to one or more of four factors. First, the enduring popularity and importance of religion in shaping the lives and identities of people all over the world, has meant that religion has not disappeared as development theorists predicted. Second, in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Twin Towers, the growth and impact of so-called 'political Islam', religious radicalisation and violent extremism, has led to increasing interest in religion and development. It has meant that many fields, including international relations and political science, have been obligated to start engaging with religion. Third, development FBOs have been attracting more attention, which has in turn led to increasing recognition that faith organisations are involved in development work all over the world. Fourth, with the introduction of broader, holistic theories and understanding of development, there has been the increasing opportunity to recognise and engage with religion and religious actors (Jones & Petersen, 2011; Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; Swart & Nell, 2016).

Religion now has a seat at the development table, with a resultant increase in research on the issue. Unfortunately, research on GBV and religion has lagged behind, despite GBV being one of the key development challenges confronting the world: "The religious politics of gender has become one of the most important issues facing humanity worldwide and is likely to remain an issue of increasing relevance for the foreseeable future (Casanova & Phillip, 2009:17)."

This section gives an overview of what is currently known about religion, development and GBV. This is followed by a discussion of the key gaps in the existing evidence base and why these gaps exist.

2.2 What do we know?

Existing research on religion, development and GBV reflects how practitioners have been quite influential in this field. As the following discussion will show, what is currently known is much concerned with the realities and practicalities of engaging with religion and religious leaders on GBV.

Patriarchy influences many world religions, religious leaders and religious communities, which is one of the biggest challenges to faith-based engagement on GBV (Le Roux, 2015; Le Roux et al, 2016). Patriarchy influences how sacred scripture is selected and interpreted, how men and women are valued and treated, and to what extent religious leaders and religious communities are willing to address GBV. With rules initially created by and for men, they become imbedded in societal customs and systems and seen as natural and unchangeable (Levitt & Ware, 2006:1170):

> *… the ancient and abiding ambivalence in monotheism towards everything feminine, an obsession with sexual transgression and misogyny in our churches and communities that has never ceased to denigrate, demean and disempower women. That tradition and theology have been constructed in such a way as to perpetuate a culture of male superiority and male privilege is a corporate failure… (Reverend John Oliver, in Petersen, 2016:51).*

Many feminists identify religion as a key structure through which patriarchy is perpetrated (see, for example, Walby, 1986 and Millet, 1969), although the extent to which religions are inherently patriarchal is a contested issue (see Alexander and Welzel, 2011; Al-Hibri, 1982; Lawless 2003). Nevertheless, it remains true that religious beliefs that promote patriarchy impact the societal roles and responsibilities that men and women are expected to assume, and challenge attempts to transform beliefs and practices that facilitate or condone GBV (Tomalin, 2013). Patriarchal religion traditionally sees maintaining the family and the couple's relationship as more important than the safety of women, meaning that violent relationships are often condoned within patriarchal religious settings (De Roure & Capraro, 2016:206-207; El-Hage, 2015).

Another major challenge to faith-based GBV work is how **sex is frequently a taboo topic**, as are related issues such as GBV or sexual and reproductive health and rights. In some settings these are culturally taboo topics; in other settings religious communities deem it off-limits (Kaviti, 2015: 497; Le Roux, 2015; Le Roux & Bowers-Du Toit, 2017). The taboo often extends to the underlying causes of GBV, such as patriarchy and gender inequality, as well as experiences of GBV. Many of these issues are perceived as inappropriate for religious leaders and communities to discuss and address. This complicates and frustrates attempts to engage with religious leaders and religious communities around GBV and its drivers and consequences. The taboo is often so strong that some religious leaders refuse to even acknowledge that GBV is happening within their communities (Le Roux & Bowers-Du Toit, 2017; Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017). As a result, religious communities are not always safe or supportive spaces for GBV survivors.

Addressing the taboo

A recent report on child marriage and religious leaders (Le Roux & Palm, 2018) found that this taboo on talking about sex and sexuality is a key driver of religious leaders' resistance to ending child marriage. (Of course this resistance to talking about sex and sexuality is not only true of many religious leaders, but of most communities). This is why the *Global Peace Foundation* in Nigeria is intentionally including discussions on sex and sexuality in their work with religious leaders, and training religious leaders so they have the skills and motivation to talk with families and congregants about sex and sexuality. Training includes explaining the difference between gender and sex, and teaching leaders to use the correct biological terms (e.g. penis, vagina, menstruation) when talking about sex. While it is often difficult to start such conversations on sex with religious leaders, the *Global Peace Foundation* believes it must be done:

While (talking about sex and sex-related matters) may rarely be the 'entry point' with religious leaders, as it often meets with strong initial resistance (especially from conservative groups), it is important to find appropriate methodologies to open up this space over time and to carefully interrogate the connections between sexuality and religion (Le Roux & Palm, 2018:27).

The fact remains that religious communities exist at grassroots level and continue to survive and even thrive despite considerable hardship. As such, but also because of what religion means to people, it can be an integral part of a holistic response to GBV. Critical to realising this potential influence and impact, though, is the actions of religious leaders. **Religious leaders are a critical dimension of working with religion and religious communities**. If one wants to work with and in religious communities, one has to work with religious leaders. They are gatekeepers to religious communities and in many religious groups, especially ones with strict hierarchical structures, it is impossible to engage with religious communities without going through their leaders (Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017). But it is important to engage and work with religious leaders in a way that empowers them and allows them to take on a 'champion' identity. This means seeing them not as obstacles to ending GBV, but rather focusing on the potential role they can play in addressing violence and injustice (Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017; Le Roux & Palm, 2018). Effective interventions offer religious leaders the opportunity to embrace a positive identity (e.g. 'encouraging positive fatherhood', rather than 'ending harmful practices').

Furthermore, it is important to **engage with all levels of religious hierarchies, in both a bottom-up and top-down approach**. Especially with religious groups which have extensive denominational leadership structures, engaging with only one level of the hierarchy can inhibit the effectiveness of the work (Bridger & Sadgrove, 2019; Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017). For example, the practical efforts of local religious leaders can be curtailed by district or regional leadership, if said leadership does not support it; at the same time, national-level leadership can find it almost impossible to force local religious leaders to address GBV if these local religious leaders are not convinced it should be done.

Engaging the religious hierarchy

Different organisations approach the religious hierarchy differently, depending on what the context requires. In India, *Vikalp Sansthan* has found it most effective to engage one-on-one with specific religious leaders; in Ethiopia *Norwegian Church Aid* has taken an institutional top-down approach from the start; while the *Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust* in Zimbabwe mobilised other faith actors within the church to challenge religious leaders resistant to ending child marriage (Le Roux & Palm, 2018).

One must also keep in mind the value of not only engaging with the traditional religious leaders, who are usually mostly men, but to be intentional with engaging various kinds of religious leaders. This includes informal religious leadership – such as leaders of music groups, women's group leaders or bible study teachers. At the same time intentional inclusion of women leaders is important. When only male religious leaders represent a religious community and mediate between the religious community and outsiders, this can lead to women's rights and needs being ignored: "It (privileges) the rights of the group over the rights of the individual, and marginalised women's voices in favour of a focus on traditional values and institutions such as the family and places of worship" (Dhaliwal & Patel, 2017:91). A recent study on child marriage and religious leaders (Le Roux & Palm, 2018) specifically advised engaging with female religious leaders, as this upsets the patriarchal system that prioritises men and male points of view. Female leaders also tend to have extensive and unique access to women in the community (Le Roux & Palm, 2018). At the same time, keep in mind that faith-based engagement should be part of a broader, community-based approach. If one works only with religious leaders, it can create division in communities (Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017). Furthermore, even if hegemonic religious interpretations and beliefs that are harmful to women and girls can be reinterpreted, working only within a religious framework runs the risk of enabling or reinforcing the absolute dominance of religious authorities and religious laws in public life (Greiff, 2010:27).

The importance of engaging women

Religions for Peace, while working with religious communities, started the *Women of Faith Network*. They formed this networked as they realised that women, while playing important roles in religious communities, are not always in positions of ordained power. It was the *Women of Faith Network* that highlighted the need for GBV response in their religious communities. This, in turn, led to USAID, in partnership with *Futures Group International* and *Religions for Peace*, formulating and implementing a project to improve the ability of religious leaders and FBOs to respond to GBV and its links to HIV. The project intentionally did not make 'religious leadership' a requirement for participation in the regional trainings, and engaged and trained both male religious leaders and women of faith (Herstad, 2009).

Two recent studies emphasised two key approaches as particularly important and effective in addressing GBV with religious leaders and religious communities. The first is **a public health approach**, where basic public health information pertinent to the issue is shared with religious leaders and/or religious communities. For example, with FGM/C many religious leaders condoning the practice simply do not know how it impacts the female body. It has been found that providing insight on the negative health consequences of these practices can even be enough for religious leaders to start opposing it. A public

health approach is also a good entry point into starting sensitive and difficult conversations with religious leaders and religious communities.

Using a public health approach

ABAAD is a Lebanese, non-religious civil association, with the aim of promoting sustainable social and economic development in the MENA region, through the promotion of equality, protection and the empowerment of marginalised groups, especially women. Even though they are explicitly non-religious, the organisation works with religious leaders on GBV. For example, between 2012 and 2015 they conducted a series of roundtable dialogues with religious leaders, aimed at ending GBV. The roundtable sessions led to a media campaign involving a video, 'We Believe', in which prominent religious leaders from various religions and denominations denounced VAWG. In their work with religious leaders, ABAAD has found a public health approach to be very effective:

This prevents a discussion from being an argument about values, but rather one on medical facts. ABAAD therefore centralizes a public health approach in its work with faith leaders to challenge HTP-related issues. This is seen as effective: "There is a greater attention when it comes to medicine. It's usually taken to heart when you're talking medicine. And so it tends to be a bit more positive or a bit easier to discuss it from this approach (Farah, June 20, 2017)" (Bartelink & Le Roux, 2017: 10).

The second approach, **a scriptural/theological approach**, has been shown to be particularly effective in working with religious leaders and communities. There is a number of reasons why this is a crucial way of engaging. First, sacred scripture is often inaccurately read and interpreted to justify gender inequality and GBV (Bridger & Sadgrove, 2019; Kaviti, 2015:501; Sadiq, 2017). Re-reading and re-interpreting such scriptures are therefore important ways of addressing religion's role in facilitating GBV. Second, engaging with sacred scripture is an especially effective way of working with religious leaders, who are comfortable with it, see themselves as experts on it, and trust it. By using sacred scripture, one is engaging through a medium they trust and find authoritative. Third, as many religious leaders have had little theological education, such theological engagement increases their ability to read and interpret their sacred text. In the study on harmful practices, the four FBOs being studied all combined a public health and theological approach, finding it the most effective way of working with religious leaders on these sensitive issues (Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017).

Using a scriptural/theological approach

Episcopal Relief and Development, in their work in Liberia with Muslim and Christian communities, invested considerable time in first supporting Liberian religious leaders so that they themselves identify problematic religious texts and interpretations, as well as helpful religious texts and interpretations. Episcopal Relief and Development believes that, for the scriptural approach to ending VAWG to work, the messaging of the intervention needs to be designed, contextualised and piloted by Liberian religious leaders themselves – and not by outsiders. Religious leaders thus took ownership of the process of rereading and reinterpretation of sacred scriptures, then taking it into their religious communities.

Examples of other FBOs using a scriptural/theological approach in their work with religious leaders and/or religious communities include:

- *World Vision's Channels of Hope Gender* uses the Bible as the basis of its training, constantly engaging with the text and guiding participants in a process of rereading and reinterpreting the text. *World Vision* has also partnered with *Islamic Relief Worldwide* in designing a Muslim version of *Channels of Hope Gender*.
- *Islamic Relief Worldwide* engages with the Qur'an not only in their GBV work with religious leaders and communities, but their official policy briefs on issues such as FGM/C and child marriage engages extensively with the religious dimensions of the practices, refuting religious justifications and explaining how the Qur'an and hadiths support these practices' eradication.
- Tearfund has produced several manuals and Bible Studies that guide facilitators and religious leaders in rereading and reinterpreting the Bible, promoting interpretations that promote gender equality and non-violence. They use these manuals in their own GBV and Masculinities work, but also make it freely available for download.

It should be noted, however, that not all development actors are able to facilitate such theological engagement:

A FBO has to have the authority and trust to be able to engage theologically with a particular faith community – and they cannot do this for all faiths and for all faith groups… If it is a non-faith organisation facilitating such theological engagement, or a FBO not seen by community members as truly religious (according to their understanding of religion), it could result in distrust of the alternative theological interpretations being offered. (Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017: 21)

At the same time it is important to remember that it does not necessarily require external faith-based actors to kickstart and drive such processes of scriptural/theological engagement. For example, many churches have developed their own contextual bible studies to help them grapple with the issues of gender equality and GBV in their context.

Contextual bible studies by religious communities

The Tamar Campaign, originally designed by the *Ujaama Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research* at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa, is one such example of faith actors and communities developing their own contextual Bible studies to help them reflect on issues of gender and gender-based violence in their context. With the Tamar Campaign, the Biblical story of the rape of Tamar is used to help facilitate discussion around sexual violence, stigma and discrimination, power, gender role socialization, and the power of family and governmental structures in protecting or harming women and girls.

Yet it remains important to not blindly assume that a feminist re-engagement with sacred texts will automatically lead to a gender-just, non-violent religious community, laws and practices (Tomalin, 2013). Some people will choose to resist feminist reinterpretation of texts. Furthermore, a person is influenced by more than just religion. If society, politics, and family, for example, continue to promote gender inequality and violence, reinterpretation of scripture is often not enough to lead to sustainable attitude and behaviour change.

2.3 Where are the gaps (and why do they exist?)

The previous section discussed what has been learnt from research on religion, development and GBV to date. But there remain gaps in our understanding of and evidence base on religion and GBV. There are a number of general reasons for these gaps. First, faith-based GBV interventions (where GBV is the focus of the intervention and not merely a component of another intervention) are a relatively new phenomenon. Intervention programming is in the process of being developed and refined, with the result that evaluation and research on it is playing catch-up. This is true also of religion, development and GBV as an academic field of study. Currently, the overwhelming majority of existing evidence is formative, or evaluation research linked to intervention programming (Le Roux, 2015).

Second, the majority of work on the intersection between religion, development and GBV is being done by practitioners in the field. It is usually not documented or, when documented, not available publicly. Thus, though there might be much going on in practice, there is limited reflection and synthesis of these activities and what is learnt through them (Magner et al, 2015; Le Roux, 2015).

Third, funding for research on religion, development and GBV is extremely limited. Much of the existing research has been due to donor demands for the evaluation of funded interventions. This means that studies are conducted on tight budgets with the implicit aim of proving the impact of programming, and thus often does not take the necessary time or depth to do robust research (Le Roux, 2015).

The following section will discuss key gaps in our understanding of religion, development and GBV. It should be noted, however, that many of these gaps are not only present when it comes to a *religious* focus on addressing or studying GBV. There are gaps in knowledge of and evidence on GBV in general. While our understanding of VAWG has developed considerably over the past twenty years, there remains much we do not yet understand. For example, there is a lack of studies that look at sexual abuse perpetrated by women; there remains large geographical gaps, particularly the Middle East and Central Asia; and there is a great need for longitudinal studies that will help separate cause from effect (Heise & Fulu, 2014).

2.3.1 Conceptualising "religion"

In their 2017 review of empirical quantitative literature from the last decade on the effect of religion on development, Basedau, Gobien and Prediger (2017) draw attention to how empirical work on religion often fails to properly define religion. This, in turn, leads to an incorrect operationalisation of the religious variable and skews the conclusions drawn by such studies, as their following example illustrates:

For example, studies interested in examining how religious ideas about work ethic affect economic growth often use country shares of people affiliated with a specific religion rather than measures of particular beliefs on work, which would better reflect the real topic of interest (Basedau et al, 2017:10-11).

In this example, religious affiliation is used as a (faulty) proxy for adherence to certain religious ideas. This is a problem of many studies on religion and development and is in a large part due to the lack of appropriate data. Researchers thus tend to rely on secondary data relating to religion, such as national census data or the World Values Survey, but the general nature of such surveys do not allow for robust reflection on specific religious variables. Put simply, what is understood as the role or impact of religion is highly suspect.

Furthermore, the heterogeneity of religion in any case severely challenges the comparability of religious concepts across countries or religious groups. Concepts like 'religion' or 'God' take on different interpretations in different countries, languages and religions. This is the challenge of many surveys, such as the World Values Survey, which strives to compare cross-nationally. Often such studies assume that religious concepts are interpreted the same way, when they are not (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011: 50). Even when religious groups are not only of the same religion, but also of the same denomination, there can still be tremendous difference in what they believe and say on gender equality, women's right and GBV (De Roure & Capraro, 2016).

'Religion' tends to be used as though it is a homogeneous category, but it is not. There is a lack of studies on religion, development and GBV that recognises the nuances of religion, clearly identifies what dimension of religion it is studying, and then actually studies that dimension. For example, if a study wants to look at the impact of the interpretation of sacred scripture on attitudes towards GBV, this needs to be identified specifically, and not be labelled as a study on the impact of religion on GBV.

A result of not defining and conceptualising 'religion' properly, is that much of existing research then uses inadequate or inappropriate religious indicators. For example, studying the impact of religious identity on GBV perpetration, perpetrators are asked with which religion (if any) they identify. Religious affiliation is, however, an inadequate proxy to use to determine religious identity. With research on religion such inaccurate proxy indicators are often used – and it is often due to an unclear conceptualisation of what is being studied, or due to lack of appropriate data. However, the result is that the actual research questions cannot be answered by the questions being asked.

The complex intersections between religion and other drivers of GBV
Conceptualising religion is possibly even more challenging when it comes to identifying drivers of GBV. It is difficult to disentangle religion from other drivers of GBV, such as culture, ethnicity, race and class. Some argue that it is impossible to do so, especially in the case of religion and culture, where religion adapts and reforms according to culture, and culture always has a religious dimension (Amor, 2000:8). Furthermore, the relationship between religion, culture and other GBV drivers will differ depending on context. For example, even within the same country, culture and religion, there will be differences between rural congregations and urban congregations (Bridger & Sadgrove, 2019).

2.3.2 Exploring the black box of religion: Gaps in non-experimental research

The lack of conceptual clarity is arguably at least partly due to a lack of formative, in-depth research that grapples and unpacks the complexity of religion within development. Deneulin and Rakodi (2011) convincingly argue that existing research on religion and development fails to adequately engage with the "meaning-giving and contextual nature of religion" (2011: 50). In other words, much of the research on religion and development is not textured and contextualised enough to adequately deal with the complex multi-dimensionality of religion. The empiricist-positivist methods so popular within especially development studies is unable to come to terms with complex social phenomena such as religion. Deneulin & Rakodi argue that:

> *... the task for development research is to understand how religious discourses are embodied in certain social practices, how social and historical processes have led to that particular embodiment, and how the religion itself redefines its discourses, and practices, in the light of changing social, economic, and political contexts (2011:51).*

Thus, despite the overwhelming majority of existing research being non-experimental in nature, there remains a lack of understanding of the complexity of the intersection between religion, development and GBV. There is a need for in-depth, contextual research (e.g. sociological, anthropological, ethnographic, etc.). Such non-experimental research is much-needed for the development of indicators, as well as the identification of variables, to be used in experimental studies. Furthermore, most of the existing non-experimental research is built around faith-based GBV interventions, usually taking the form of qualitative evaluation research (such as case studies). Again, while these contribute to an expanding understanding of religion and GBV, there is a need for non-experimental research on religion, development and GBV *for its own sake*. In other words, the research agenda should not always be influenced (directly or indirectly) by the need to justify certain intervention practices. The research agenda should be driven by the need to understand the unique and different dimensions of religion and how it impacts development and GBV within specific contexts.

2.3.3 Lack of causal inference

One of the key problems of the existing evidence on religion and development, is the difficulty in inferring the causality of empirical correlations between religious dimensions and developmental dimensions (Basedau et al, 2017:11). In other words, how can we prove that religion is the reason for certain development outcomes? Much of the existing research on religion and development makes assumptions around causality. For example, a positive correlation between the religious belief in responsible stewardship of nature with engagement in water-saving practices leads to statements claiming that

religious beliefs lead to eco-friendly practices. Yet what if the study itself only showed a correlation, not causality? The correlation may be due to a third variable not under consideration, such as rising municipal water levies. Many studies do not consider or include other variables, make decisive claims about correlation without even acknowledging the possibility of the influence of other variables, or claim a causal relationship without having studied causality. With some studies, the direction between the religious variable and the development variable can be reversed: for example, the positive correlation between religious affiliation and income inequality is interpreted as meaning that inequality causes religion, whereas it is also possible that religious ideas foster income inequality (Basedau et al, 2017:12).

These are methodological issues, which robust research practice and analysis can go a long way in addressing. Currently, the majority of evidence on religion and development is correlational rather than causal (Basedau et al, 2017:12). Unfortunately, especially in policy and advocacy spaces, such evidence is often mistakenly used to claim causality. While the causal effect of religion on development, particularly in relation to GBV, is challenging to study, it remains much-needed.

2.3.4 Lack of experimental research

Reflecting on existing studies of faith-based GBV interventions, there is a dearth of experimental studies, such as randomised control trials and quasi-experimental studies. Experimental research is appropriate for studying causality, allowing one to determine which factors causes change in an outcome. A crucial contribution to advancing experimental research, is the development of standardised indicators, questions, and measurement scales on religion and GBV.

Standardised measurement
VAWG research benefits greatly from the work done by, for example, the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Life Events, the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WGDS), or the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale (Pulerwitz & Barker, 2008). Due to the extensive work done developing the indicators, questions and logic of such studies, the entire VAWG research community benefits from having thematic study areas and corresponding survey items that have been proven to be reliable. If, for example, a VAWG study wants to also include measurement of the disability status of respondents, they can simply draw on the WGDS's short set of disability questions.

At least part of the reason for the lack of experimental research, is lack of funding. Experimental studies are expensive to run, and many faith actors simply do not have the money to do it, or to do it properly.

2.3.5 Gaps in monitoring, evaluation and learning

There appears to be a general lack of robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) of intervention programming. Due to lack of prioritising and/or funding, this step of the intervention process tends to be neglected and findings rarely communicated outside of the implementing organisation. Furthermore, intervention programming is rarely evaluated for sustainability of impact.

Moreover, where organisations are under pressure to show positive impact, findings are often presented in such a way as to prove the effectiveness of programming, even if it was not the case. There is a need for implementation research that honestly reflects on the challenges and failures of interventions (Olivier, 2017). This is to the detriment of our general understanding of how religion functions within development

and GBV. There is thus a great need for robust MEL, with findings communicated honestly and more widely, and for donors to be more open to honest communication without it automatically jeopardising chances of future funding.

The benefits of sharing MEL and research findings
In 2017 a consortium of members of the GBV Hub of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities undertook a study funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), entitled "Working effectively with faith leaders to challenge harmful traditional practices". The study conducted case studies within five different organisations. The findings from the study was freely shared online, through individual case study reports for each organisation, as well as a synthesis report. An in-person dissemination meeting was held in London, with representatives from each organisation, as well as JLI members and DFID staff. A webinar was also conducted, sharing the findings from the research.

What was novel about this project, was that each organisation openly shared not only their successes, but also their struggles – and agreed to be named in the reports. Arguably a crucial part of the process was having external researchers, not affiliated with any of the organisations, conduct the research within each organisation. Through document review and interviews, a picture emerged of both the ups and downs of working with faith leaders on harmful practices. But as the same questions were asked of all five organisations, a much clearer picture emerged of trends in work with faith leaders on harmful practices, as it was based on work by different organisations, in different countries, with different religions, and in different ways. The synthesis of findings that was possible because of the case study organisations' willingness to be transparent, greatly contributed to a better understanding of faith leader engagement on harmful practices.

2.3.6 Gaps in focus

Reflecting on existing research, one sees an emphasis on certain regions, religions and issues related to development and GBV. The following gaps are present:

- Existing research tends to be dominated by a focus on Christianity, with a secondary and growing reflection on Islam. Studies of non-Abrahamic religions in relation to GBV and development are rare. Therefore, our understanding of religion, development and GBV is highly coloured by only a few religions. Research on Buddhism, Hinduism, traditional religions, etc. in relation to development and GBV should be encouraged (particularly religions without a central sacred text), before definitive statements can be made about the intersection between religion, development and GBV.
- In existing research there is also a fairly narrow focus on specific regions, focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and the United States of America (Le Roux, 2015). This contributes to a narrow understanding of religion, development and GBV.
- Existing research also tends to come from the same organisations and/or programming. While this research is desperately needed, there is a need to also understand religion, development and GBV outside of large, international development FBOs. This is linked to a researcher's or organisation's ability to disseminate research on accessible and internationally recognised platforms, such as academic journal articles and international conferences. The research done by those who do not have the same privilege and access tends to not have the same reach. Furthermore, there is a lack of

research on how non-faith actors are understanding, conceptualising and engaging with religion and religious actors.

- Lastly, existing research tends to focus on religious leaders or female, heterosexual GBV survivors. This leaves substantial gaps round understanding religion, development and GBV as it pertains to other groups e.g. GBV perpetrators, sex workers, and LGBTIQ persons. The current body of knowledge on religion, development and GBV is thus very narrowly focused around certain types of victims and victimisation.

3. Where to now?

3.1 The power of working in partnership

PaRD is a partnership consisting of actors from various sectors working in religion and/or sustainable development. Its aim is to facilitate communication and coordination that strengthens partnerships between secular and non-secular actors. In the light of the current research existing on religion, development and GBV, as well as the research gaps identified above, this section identifies and reflects on the value of partnerships between governmental, intergovernmental and civil society organisations working together to address these gaps.

A recent synthesis of literature on the role of FBOs in preventing and responding to sexual violence, intimate partner violence and GBV in conflict settings, found that collaborative partnerships were crucial to ensuring the effective delivery of interventions aimed at addressing GBV (Magner et al, 2015:13). This is in line with the call of noted VAWG researcher Lori Heise for an integrated, ecological framework for understanding GBV. She argues against narrow, disciplinary approaches and single-factor theories, stating that the multifaceted nature of GBV calls for an integrated approach that can deal with the "full complexity and messiness of real life" (Heise, 1998: 262). Heise argues convincingly that personal, situational and sociocultural factors all influence whether GBV is experienced. This multifaceted nature of GBV inevitably calls for an integrated, multi-sector, holistic response to it. If the drivers of GBV lie on so many different levels, how can one intervention agent respond to all of them? There is a need for multi-sector responses, where there is mutual understanding, respect and contribution from religious and secular actors (Le Roux et al, 2016; Le Roux & Loots, 2017). The JLI has focused on bridging academic, practitioner, and policy maker divides in the area, with recent examples including the collaboration with DFID, NGOs, and Stellenbosch University and Groningen University on research related to faith leaders and harmful practices (Le Roux & Bartelink, 2017). Outputs of this work were tailored to different audiences, including academic publications, policy briefs, events and presentations, and NGO specific case studies.

Collaboration benefitting GBV programming
A recent evaluation of World Vision's *PTL Reducing Gender Based Violence Project* in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Timor-Leste, found that greater collaboration by local intervention teams, with other actors working on GBV at all levels (local to regional) can make existing programming more efficient, but also lead to greater outcomes. Especially in communities with a crowded GBV space, such collaboration is strategic in terms of ensuring consistent messaging, as well as programme efficiency and effectiveness. This is even more the case in programming that works on norm-change, that greatly benefits from collaborating with programming providing more tangible outcomes:

For example, many communities requested something concrete and it was also evident that in many communities very basic amenities were missing. Given the importance of toilets for anti-violence work, it would be useful to build a toilet that on its walls (inside and out) had anti-violence messaging. This action could address both basic WASH needs and women's safety. It would be a tremendous safety increasing measure in most of the rural communities, would be a tangible asset and a place where messaging could be permanently part of the community landscape (Meyer & Nikulainen, 2018:51).

The ecological framework shows us that different actors are ideally placed to intervene at different levels of individual, community, social, and political life. For example, the World Bank is well-positioned to intervene at a policy and institutional level, but less able to meaningfully leverage community-based programming. But a local church or mosque, unable to influence at policy or institutional level, is able to intervene at community-level by addressing taboo topics such as sexual and reproductive health and rights. Another example is the piloting of potential interventions. A local FBO can be an incubator of innovation, where new approaches and programming is tested and refined. Once ready to be implemented nationally or regionally, larger partners can assist in taking it to scale.

Effective partnerships are thus about recognising the different spaces of comparative advantages and working in a coordinated manner to leverage it most effectively. Truly unique and effective responses can result from cooperation between different sectors. Responsible persons need to cooperate to work together on "specific problems, within structures of relations that connect them to other moral worlds and from projects created by people trying to make those relations better" (Jenkins, in Braley, 2017:747). These different perspectives and voices in conversation can lead to unexpected new ways of understanding and responding to issues threatening human life and dignity (Braley, 2017:748).

How does one proceed to form such spaces of cooperation? Reflecting on the formation of PaRD, Azza Karam (2017) identifies many crucial steps. It requires an intentional convening of diverse stakeholders, ones that have not previously met together and have overlapping but also different areas of interest and spheres of activity. In other words, multi-sectoral partnership is not possible if one does not ensure that multiple sectors are present. One such blind spot, Adams (2016) argues, is Muslim FBOs. They are uniquely positioned, having a foot both within the Muslim religious world, but also within the world of international development. Yet, aside from a few larger secularized Muslim FBOs, they remain quite unengaged by the mainstream international development community.

The value of collaborative networks is that candid and honest discussion is possible, especially with time as the partners meet repeatedly and trust develops. Furthermore, meeting and cooperating repeatedly serves to normalise such cooperation. In the field of religion and development, such a network thus plays a central role in normalising the inclusion of religion within discussion of and response to development and GBV. In doing so, they also create an example of how such cooperation can happen, offering a template of and standards for collaboration (Karam, 2017).

But it is important not to only have multi-level partnerships, but to implement and leverage it effectively. This would include identifying a value chain in work, ensuring that each partner is leveraged in its area of comparative advantage. Such work would avoid duplication and foster complementary work.

Incentivising collaboration

In a study of the health services provided by religious communities in South Africa, Schmid et al (1999) suggest that the inter-faith and inter-denomination collaboration that happens is at least partly due to government funding that is only made available on the condition of such collaboration. Thus, it serves to point out that, where partnership and cooperation fail to arise organically, donors and funders can encourage such collaboration by making it a condition for funding.

Including religion at the table through such networks must, however, try to avoid the following typical pitfalls. First, the aim of such partnership between different actors around religion, development and GBV, is not to change the other's actions or beliefs (Karam, 2017). On the contrary, this partnership should facilitate a critical inward reflection, in the light of exposure to other actors' opinions and actions. According to Baig (2016), secular partners often view women only as suppressed and victimised by their own religion, ignoring other factors, such as how global economic structural inequalities are oppressing women. Furthermore, productive partnership is arguably only possible if secular partners understand how religion functions in the contexts where they will be working together (Gingerich et al, 2017:5). Yet lack of religious literacy is not limited to secular partners. Many international FBOs recognise that they can benefit from a greater level of religious literacy, to enable them to better contextualise their work in specific settings (Gingerich et al, 2017:6).

How to engage with and respect partners' perspectives

One possible way of avoiding this pitfall, is to be intentional in trying to understand one's own and partners' religious or worldview perspectives. This will require (Roodsaz & Von Reamdonck, 2018:21):

- Tempering and contextualising claims
- Being open to the possibility of unlearning prejudices and habits, by tracing them through history
- Allowing for reconsideration and possible reformulation of 'the problem'
- Allowing for the reconsideration and possible reformulation of concepts such as 'development', 'participation', and 'impact'
- A religiously-based discussion of human rights (Gingerich et al, 2017:6).
- An intentional unpacking of secular assumptions (Gingerich et al, 2017:6).

This can be done through an externally facilitated discussion, or series of discussions. Such a discussion can be concluded with a formal agreement to respect each others' opinions and perspectives – an agreement that can be called upon should a partner feel his/her positioning is not being respected. Part of this process is to also allow partners to disengage from the partnership, should they feel themselves unable to cooperate with certain worldviews or approaches.

Second, religious leaders are often included in such networks as the religious voice and religion's representative. Yet it is impossible for a few religious leaders to represent all of religion: not only can they only represent a few religions and denominations, but religious leadership is only one dimension of religion (Karam, 2017). Furthermore, this can result in a top-down approach in agenda-setting on women's rights

issues, especially harmful as religious leaders are usually men (Baig, 2016:210). The challenge is therefore to have diversity in the religious voices that are present, but at the same time to avoid including religious leaders in merely a token-like manner.

> *Intentionally choosing certain religious leaders*
> Raees Begum Baig (2016), in discussing the plight of migrant Muslim women in Hong Kong, highlights the importance of being intentional about the kind of religious leaders that are engaged with in collaborative attempts to address GBV. She explains that social workers experienced difficulties in promoting women's rights in migrant Muslim communities, as the social workers could not understand their perceptions of gender and rights. The social workers' approach to educating the public on women's rights and GBV was simply not working, as they did not understand and could not engage with the interpretation of GBV in Islamic teachings. Islamic feminists, on the other hand, have this substantive knowledge of Islam and thus the ability to engage with the power inequality and institutional injustice present in Muslim women's lives. Thus they are able to engage with and educate other Muslim women on challenging the patriarchal structure.

Third, the role of religion in development should not be limited to serving as moral compass (Karam, 2017). If religious actors are handed the moral high ground, this means that there is little room for discussion when religious principles contradict universal human rights – as may often be the case with GBV. Again, with religious leaders usually being men, there is a vested interest in keeping the status quo regarding women's subjugated status. Religious actors' beliefs and opinions are not automatically more moral simply because of their religious dimension. Greiff warns against relaxing human rights standards on VAWG to be culturally or religiously sensitive:

> *Out of a genuine desire to respect world diversity and multiculturalism, many in the international community and particularly in the `West' are relaxing the same human rights standards they wish to promote and are excusing or minimising VAW if it is touted as an `authentic' cultural, religious, or traditional practice (Greiff, 2010:3).*

3.2 Agenda setting

This report is meant to serve as guiding document in identifying a research agenda for an international, multi-sectoral network's focus on religion and SDG #5 (gender equality and empowerment). With SDG #5 covering a number of focus areas and objectives, the GEE Work-stream at the General Assembly in 2018 decided to focus on SDG #5.2, therefore focusing its work on violence against women and girls (VAWG). The Work-stream's agenda is structured, in line with PaRD, on Knowledge Exchange, Joint Advocacy and Capacity Building. This report's aim is to contribute to a proposed research agenda, which can inform coordinated partnerships in the different areas of the Work-stream's activities.

First, there is a need to take into account existing research on religion, development and GBV, as well as gaps in the existing literature, in order to ensure that the Work-stream's efforts contribute to the growth of understanding of religion in relation to development and GBV. Thus, based on the preceding sections, as well as the Work-stream's agreed focus, the following recommendations are made regarding the development of a research agenda.

3.2.1 Make the case for research

The purpose and goal of research on religion, development and GBV needs to be rethought. The existing evidence base cannot explain *how* religion functions in relation to GBV. Previous research has drawn some correlations, and many in the faith sector have gut instincts, but as yet there is no clear understanding of what needs to be done, and how, and where, to achieve a desired effect. While there are already people convinced of the crucial role that religion can play in ending GBV, there is still a limited understanding of the mechanics of how it works and if it can be sustained. If it is not understood, how can it effectively be harnessed for change?

It is therefore highly recommended that opportunities be created for seeing and doing research differently. The aim of should not be to prove the impact of religion on ending GBV, or to provide soundbites for advocacy purposes. Research should be approached as an indispensable tool for figuring out how things work.

3.2.2 Support and promote good research

The overview of existing research has shown that much research on religion, development and GBV is not methodologically robust enough to produce reliable evidence. A clear understanding of what dimension of religion is being studied must always be present, and the variables being studied should be appropriate. It can contribute greatly to research on religion, development and GBV if tried and tested research domains, indicators and items can be developed. It will help promote a body of evidence that is comparable, but also make adding a religious dimension to 'secular' VAWG studies much more of a possibility. This is important not only for quantitative research, but also qualitative research, where there is a need for a cohesive body of evidence that engages with the different dimensions of religion.

Promoting good research also includes supporting robust MEL processes by faith actors involved in GBV prevention and response. This includes the wider dissemination of such findings, at the very least within a learning community or network of like-minded actors, so that learning can be wider than only within individual organisations.

Part of the process of supporting good research, is building, developing and strengthening the capacity of local religious actors to understand and use research. Where faith communities at grassroots level are able to access and understand research on religion, development and GBV, they are better able to formulate intervention strategies that are appropriate to their context. Information sharing should thus be encouraged and facilitated, through published and grey literature, conferences, webinars and workshops. Furthermore, where possible, researchers should use participatory research methods that builds local capacity for doing and understanding research.

A last, but crucial component, of doing good research, is doing research ethically. With such a highly sensitive topic such as GBV, this becomes even more important. It is important to promote ethical research practices, including with MEL. At the very least ethical research practices include full anonymity of participants and confidentiality of the information shared; informed consent by participants over the age of 18 years, and informed consent by a parent/guardian of those younger than 18 years; voluntary participation by all participants, including awareness of the right to refuse to answer and withdraw from participation at any time; and protection of all research data from unauthorised access at all times.

3.2.3 Promoting collaborative partnerships through research

The importance and power of multi-sectoral partnership in addressing GBV was discussed earlier in this report. Part of the process of developing such partnerships is doing the needed research that identifies the comparative advantage of each actor, and how and when this can be leveraged within the response to GBV. Faith-based actors, for example, need to do research in order to better understand their area of unique impact and the conditions under which it can be effectively utilised. This can also differ depending on whether it is local, national, regional or international faith actors, and it can differ depending on where they are working.

Yet research can be a partnership-building activity in itself. Collaboratively doing research, as well as MEL on the collaborative process, can thus be utilised as part of the process of understanding each other's perspectives and viewpoints, building trust and transparency.

3.2.4 Developing a focused research agenda that is informed by current gaps in evidence

This report has detailed gaps in existing research on religion, development and GBV. Summarising very briefly, these can be captured as:

- Conceptualising religion
- Causality
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Standardised indicators, questions, and measurement scales on religion and GBV
- Capturing diversity: heterogeneity of religion; different regions; different victims and victimisation

It is advised that the GEE Work-stream identifies specific activities that are linked to addressing the gaps, for example:

- Developing a recommended MEL framework and guide for religion and GBV
- Organising among partners to prioritise evaluations and bring forward evidence from underserved areas
- Prioritising new research that studies underserved areas
- Linking with non-faith VAWG researchers and research collaborations, to explore possibilities for research collaboration
- Developing and submitting a large-scale research grant bid, to finance experimental research

Another possible way of ensuring focused and impactful response, is to prioritise addressing only one or two gaps, instead of responding to all. All GEE Work-stream activities are then focused around only one or two gaps. For example, should the Work-stream prioritise responding to the gap in robust MEL, its activities are all focused around addressing this gap:

- Developing a recommended MEL framework and guide for religion and GBV
- Training local faith community partners on conducting MEL
- Funding and organising dissemination events for MEL

Developing specific research questions relating to a gap and activity can help guide the GEE Work-stream into ensuring that all its activities contribute towards reaching the Work-stream's goals and that each question is adequately addressed.

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    For the full resource toolkit from this study, including a webinar, policy briefs, case studies, and bibliographies, see the JLI GBV Hub Resource Toolkit here: https://gender-based-violence.jliflc.com/about-gbv-hub/htp-study/

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