

FAITH COMMUNITIES' CONTRIBUTION TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

ABOUT THE RESEARCH



Queen Margaret University
INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL HEALTH
AND DEVELOPMENT

Partner | Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Type | Five-year (2016-2021), multi-country, longitudinal study

Objective | To gauge the impact of engaging local faith communities to strengthen the protective environment supporting child well-being.

Locations | Senegal (predominantly Muslim), Uganda (Christian and Muslim), and Guatemala (Christian).

Overview

Children thrive in strong communities, equipped and strengthened to address child protection challenges. Faith leaders, their spouses and faith communities play a critical role in shaping community social norms and catalysing shifts in attitudes and behaviours that can protect children more effectively.

World Vision has had ample experience working alongside faith communities and leaders to tackle complex social issues with an attitude and social behavior change project model called Channels of Hope. In recent years, Channels of Hope has been adapted to tackle child protection issues within communities such as child marriage, neglect, corporal punishment, and child labour.

To test effective ways of engaging faith communities, a research study was conducted over 5 years (2016-2021) in partnership with Queen Margaret University (Edinburgh) gathering data from communities in Guatemala (a Christian majority context), Senegal (a Muslim majority context), and Uganda (mixture of Christian and Muslim contexts).

The goal of the research was to understand how Channels of Hope for Child Protection equips faith leaders and faith communities to take action to reduce violence in their local communities and at higher levels of society.



274 faith leaders and their spouses were interviewed

Process

- QMU collected data from communities where the Channels of Hope for Child Protection intervention was being implemented and from comparison sites with similar key socio-economic, religious, and cultural factors where programming included other child protection initiatives but not Channels of Hope for Child Protection.
- The quantitative component of the research included a survey of faith leaders and their spouses measuring child protection-related knowledge, attitudes, practices, and theological reflections and a survey exploring community norms (what others do, what others believe should be done, and personal beliefs with regard to a specific child protection issue) conducted with Congregational Hope Action Team (CHAT) members, faith congregation members, and community members.
- Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with faith leaders, their spouses, congregations, community leaders, and child protection actors, and participatory activities were conducted with girls and boys ages 11-17.

THE INTERVENTION

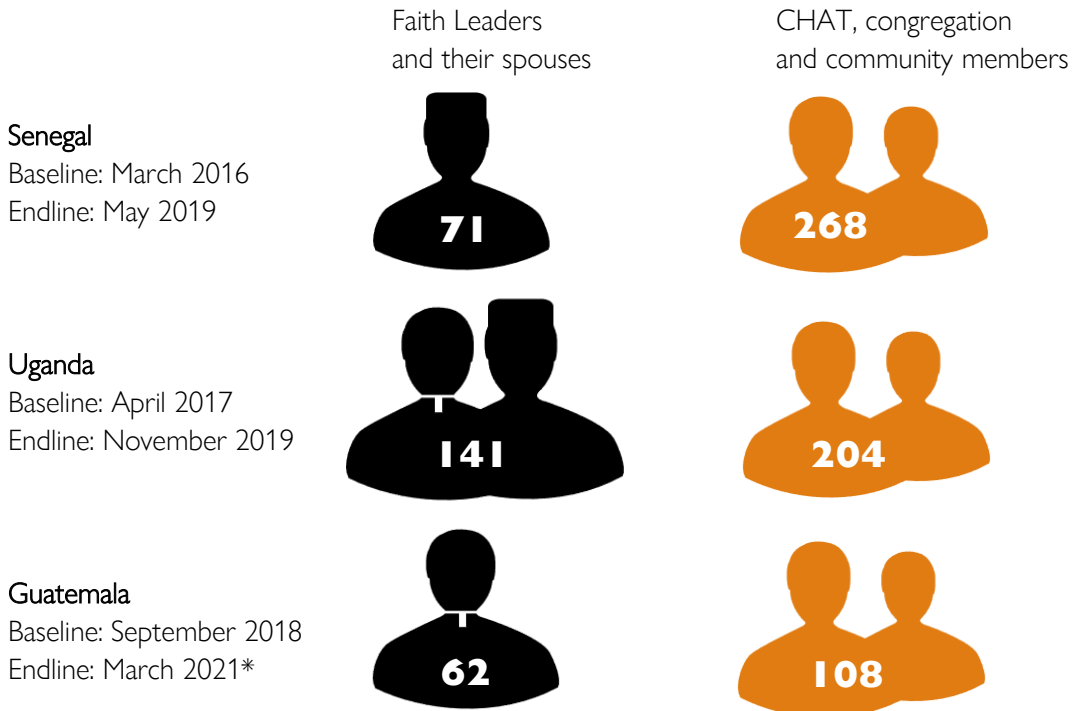
Channels of Hope for Child Protection

Channels of Hope is a World Vision project model that motivates and builds capacity in faith leaders and faith communities to engage with key child well-being issues. Channels of Hope for Child Protection is one adaptation of the model that specifically addresses child protection issues and fosters a wider enabling environment to strengthen both formal and non-formal elements of the child protection system.

The Channels of Hope for Child Protection intervention includes workshops with faith leaders and their spouses and with CHAT to raise awareness about key child protection issues, including abuse, neglect, harmful practices, and other forms of violence against children.

Faith leaders, their spouses, and CHAT members then mobilize communities to foster the development of an environment that advances the protection, support, and well-being of children. For more information visit wvi.org/faith-and-development/channels-hope

Participants



* Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, QMU did not travel, they were supported remotely by World Vision Guatemala staff.

Key Findings

The research found that in all three country contexts, participation in the Channels of Hope for Child Protection programme motivated faith leaders to take action to improve child well-being. Notable positive changes were observed in attitudes about child marriage, corporal punishment and willingness to report child abuse.

Following their participation in the Channels of Hope for Child Protection workshops, faith leaders and their spouses experienced a profound transformation of their perspectives about child protection and child well-being in a way that empowered them to mobilise their faith communities for child protection work.

“Faith leaders do engage in child protection. They not only teach but also go into the community and sensitise people on child protection issues.”

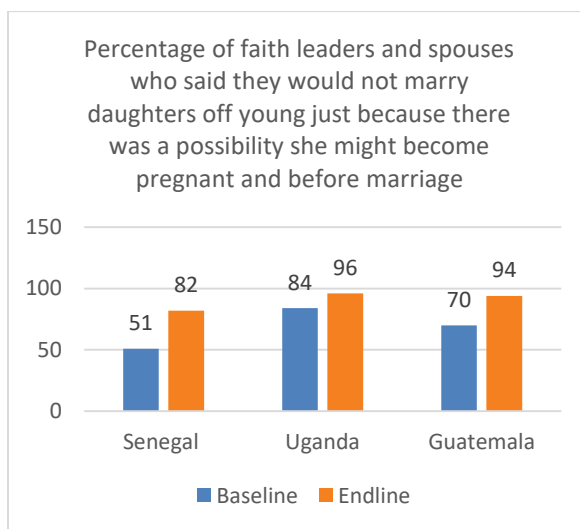
~Child protection advocate, Uganda

Attitudes about child marriage

Faith leaders and their spouses experienced positive changes in their attitudes toward child marriage. In all three countries, harmful views about child marriage decreased markedly following participation in the programme.

After participating in the programme, the number of faith leaders and spouses who said that they would *not* marry their daughter off young just because there was a possibility that she might become pregnant before being married increased: by 31% in Senegal, by 12% in Uganda, and by 24% in Guatemala.

In Senegal and Uganda, many faith leaders said that they no longer officiated marriages involving young girls and they now ask for birth registration or immunisation cards when conducting marriage ceremonies.



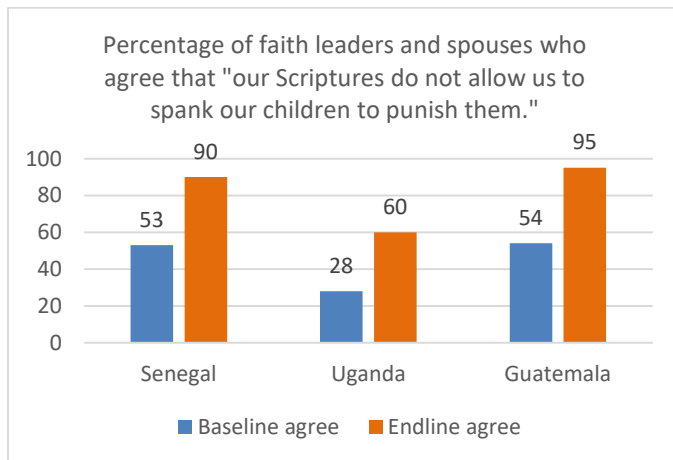
“Today we heard the imams talk about child marriage. We follow their words with our young girls. Among us, who want to give their daughter in marriage before the age of 18, we advise them to avoid it because she has not reached the age.”

~Community member, Senegal

Attitudes toward child discipline

Faith leaders and their spouses experienced long-term positive changes in their attitudes on norms around child discipline after participating in the Channels of Hope for Child Protection programme. In all three countries, faith leaders and their spouses said that, because of the training, their previous beliefs that children should be obedient and need physical punishment had changed. They recognised that physical punishment does not contribute to children's development and that corporal punishment is not an appropriate way to discipline children.

The number of faith leaders and spouses who agreed that their Scriptures prohibit spanking children increased by 37% in Senegal, 32% in Uganda, and 41% in Guatemala. In Uganda, the percentage of faith leaders and their spouses who agreed that a misbehaving child should not be hit or beaten increased by 40% (from 11% to 51%). In Guatemala, the increase was 24% (from 60% to 84%). Congregational Hope Action Team (CHAT) members also reported experiencing positive changes concerning beliefs and practices around corporal punishment and shared stories of personal transformation. In Guatemala, CHAT members said that after participating in the workshops they saw children as created in the image of God and to treat them well because mistreating children would be mistreating God.



Previously, when I mistreated my children, I did not think I was doing anything wrong. But when I attended a meeting of Channels of Hope, I learned that children are created in the image of God, and by mistreating my children, I also mistreat God. From that day I decided not to say rude words to them, and now I tell them that I love them and they are important to me."

~ CHAT member, Guatemala

Willingness to report child abuse

Faith leaders, their spouses, and CHAT members felt more empowered to report child abuse after participating in the workshops. The number of faith leaders and spouses who agreed that reporting child abuse was more important than maintaining good social relations increased by 23% in Senegal (where it went from 64% to 87%) and by 18% in Uganda (where it went from 71% to 89%).

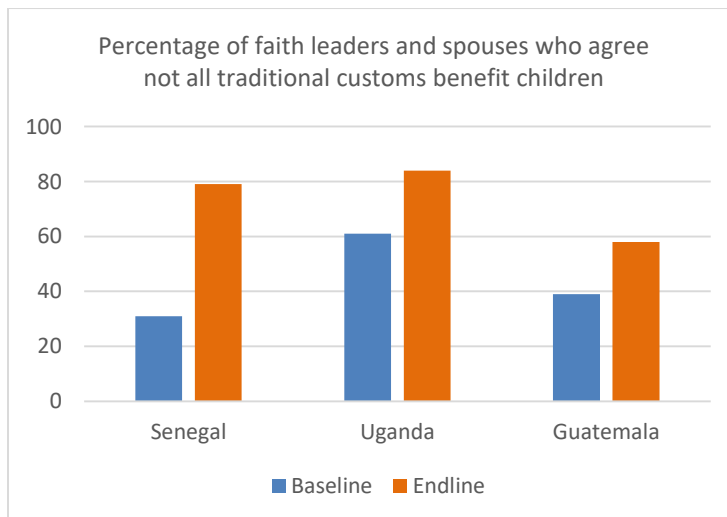
Similarly, at interviews and focus group discussions in Guatemala, community members and child protection actors confirmed that faith leaders had started reporting child protection cases, overcoming previous fears of potential retaliation for doing so.

580 CHAT, congregation and community members interviewed



Challenging traditional customs

In all three countries, there was a notable increase in the percentage of faith leaders and their spouses who agreed that not all traditional customs benefit children.



Gender equality in education

Interviews and focus group discussions across the three countries consistently indicated that faith leaders, their spouses, congregation members and others in the community experienced changes in their attitudes toward the education of girls after participating in CoH CP.

In Guatemala, for example, a number of study participants said that parents and caregivers came to realise that boys and girls should be treated equally and provided with the same opportunities.

“Before, they [parents/caregivers] used to put more value on boys than on girls. They did not give them the same opportunity to study. But, thank God, now both males and females have the same rights.”

~ Faith leader, Guatemala

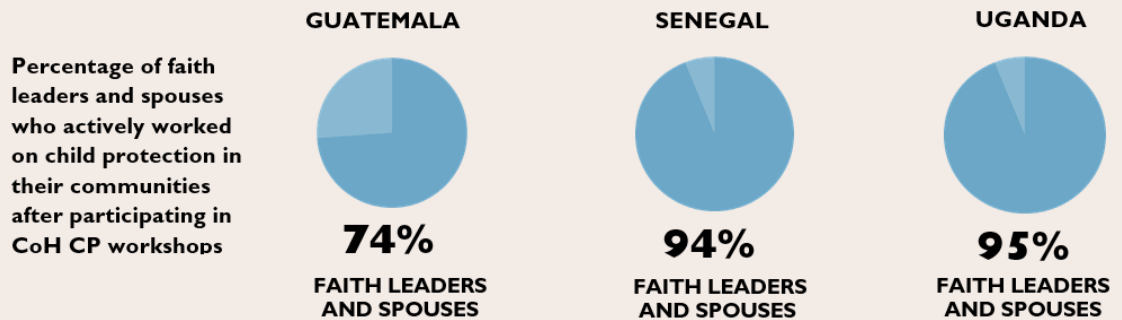


Channels of Hope training helped adults see children as made in God's image

“I changed my attitude, especially on educating girls. I learned that girls need to be educated. I changed my attitude of saying that girls do all the domestic work according to culture.”

~ Faith leader, Uganda

FAITH LEADER ENGAGEMENT IN CHILD PROTECTION



“I attended two training sessions that allowed me to gain much knowledge about child protection and I learned in the Scriptures this verse that talks about child protection.”

~ Faith leader, Senegal

Country-specific positive changes

Children’s Perspectives in Guatemala

Following their participation in the workshops, faith leaders and their spouses in Guatemala acknowledged the importance of listening to children. They spoke of making more effort than before to listen to their children and discuss matters that concern them. This represented a significant change from attitudes at baseline. For example, the number of faith leaders and spouses who said that adults should let children participate in decisions that affect their lives increased from 36% to 53%.

“Sometimes you are busy, and the child gets desperate. They feel discouraged that the father and mother do not take into account what they want to say. Today we understand that, when a child wants to talk to us, we must give them the time.”

~ Faith leader, Guatemala

Inter-faith collaboration in Uganda

In Uganda, participation of faith leaders and their spouses in Channels of Hope for Child Protection stimulated cooperation and enhanced collaboration on child protection issues. The number of faith leaders and spouses who said that members of their church or mosque meet with people from other churches or mosques to consider ways to protect the most vulnerable children in their community increased from 79% to 97% (in the comparison group it remained the same, at 75%). In interviews and focus group discussions, Channels of Hope participants reported conducting joint sensitisation, preaching and home visits with leaders from other faith groups to raise community awareness on child protection.

“After the training by World Vision, we realised that children belong to the entire community and belong to one God. We decided to put aside our differences to protect child rights. We do this by conducting joint meetings collective sensitisation and exchange visits, with a Muslim going to church and vice versa.”

~ Faith leader, Uganda

Birth registration in Senegal

In Senegal, interviews showed that faith leaders are now playing an important role in promoting birth registration. Birth registration was always the responsibility of parents and caregivers, who often tended to postpone or neglect doing it, even though a birth certificate is needed as proof of age and to obtain a national identify card for state services. Following their participation in the workshops, faith leaders are now coordinating with village chiefs to make sure newborns are registered, and are working on obtaining birth registration for older children through the courts.

“What motivated me [to do this] was because I attended training with World Vision. It is even written in the Qur’an, because the child has the same right as the old, the child is a person, so he has the right to have an identity and to know what nationality he is... I called the village chief. I let parents know that if they do not have a birth certificate [for the child], they cannot get a national identity card. ... This year I have dealt with 31 cases... and even the court congratulated me about this work.”

~ Faith leader, Senegal

Learn more about this research [here](#) or contact Kathryn_Kraft@wvi.org