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MEN, MINING, AND MASCULINITIES

A Social Norms Approach to GBV Prevention in Artisanal Mining Communities



Community members gather at the close of a Male Involvement in Social Norms Transformation session, Penhalonga.

MenEngage Africa Symposium — Presentation Report

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Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present this report, *Men, Mining, and Masculinities: A Social Norms Approach to GBV Prevention in Artisanal Mining Communities*. The findings documented here reflect the courage of communities in Penhalonga, Mutasa District, who have chosen to confront harmful norms and practices that perpetuate violence against women and girls.

Penhalonga is a gender-based violence hotspot within the district. Like other artisanal mining communities, it is marked by poverty, instability, and entrenched patriarchal structures. Within this context, Youth Alive Zimbabwe has worked to engage men, faith leaders, and young people in critical reflection on power, accountability, and gender equality. Through the SASA! Faith methodology and the Men in Action (MIA) Fire Circle sessions, men have begun to challenge harmful masculinities, embrace non-violent relationships, and take responsibility for creating safer households and communities.

This report demonstrates that change is possible when communities themselves lead the transformation of social norms. It highlights how faith leaders have reinterpreted religious teachings to affirm equality, how men have pledged to mentor the next generation toward respect and consent, and how women and girls have found stronger support systems to resist violence and exploitation.

The lessons here are not only for Penhalonga, but for communities across Zimbabwe and beyond. They remind us that prevention must be rooted in both social and economic realities, and that sustainable change requires collaboration across households, communities, and institutions.

On behalf of Youth Alive Zimbabwe, I commend our SASA! Faith team members implementing the ICSP project (Ruvaraishe Tapera, Mildred Dafana, Bridgeter Wapwanyika, and James Matsure), for their commitment to building positive masculinities and accountable communities. I also extend my sincere gratitude to the authors and participants for their contributions in documenting the progress made so far. May this report inspire continued action to ensure that no woman or girl is left behind in the struggle against gender-based violence.

Sr Elizabeth Mbariro
Executive Director, Youth Alive Zimbabwe

Abstract

Violence against women (VAW) remains widespread in artisanal mining communities in Zimbabwe, where poverty, unsafe livelihoods, alcohol abuse, and unequal gender relations shape harmful social norms. This study examined how the SASA! Faith methodology and male engagement approaches influence attitudes, behaviours, and community responses to VAW in Penhalonga, Mutasa District.

The study employed a qualitative research design grounded in social norms theory and community-based prevention approaches. Researchers collected data through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and community dialogue observations involving male artisanal miners, women, faith leaders, community leaders, and adolescent girls. The study analysed participants' experiences with gender relations, power, transactional sex, child marriage, and violence, while assessing how SASA! Faith activities influenced community attitudes and practices.

The findings revealed that harmful masculinities, economic insecurity, and normalized violence increased women's exposure to intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, and coercive relationships within mining communities. Participants reported that transactional sex often emerged as a survival strategy linked to unstable incomes, while alcohol consumption at mining sites intensified domestic violence and unsafe sexual practices. Male engagement activities under SASA! Faith encouraged critical reflection among men on power, accountability, and non-violent relationships, and several participants described improved communication within households, increased willingness to report violence, and stronger community accountability for protecting women and girls. Faith leaders who participated in the initiative also challenged religious beliefs that previously justified male dominance and women's silence. Community dialogues further increased awareness of child marriage risks and strengthened local support systems for women experiencing violence.

The study concludes that social norms programming rooted in faith engagement and male participation can strengthen prevention efforts in high-risk artisanal mining contexts. The findings support the integration of SASA! Faith within humanitarian protection and community-based Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention strategies targeting mining communities affected by violence, economic instability, and harmful gender norms.

1.0 Introduction and Context

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) has expanded rapidly across Manicaland Province, drawing men, women, and youth into an informal economy marked by unstable income, weak regulation, and limited access to formal protection services. Penhalonga, in Mutasa District, is one such community: gold panning and small-scale mining sit alongside longstanding patterns of poverty, migration, and social disruption.

Regional evidence corroborates the severity of this risk environment. Civil Society documentation of Penhalonga specifically has linked the influx of transient male workers and environmental degradation from mining to elevated sexual exploitation, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol abuse, alongside the erosion of women's agricultural livelihoods as land is lost to mining. Scholars on Zimbabwean gold-mining communities similarly document how women's economic survival strategies — gold panning, vending, and sex work — have long been shaped by, and negotiated within, masculinised and often exploitative mining hierarchies.



Fire Circle Sessions: James facilitating a discussion on the topic “Voice Over Fists”, with men from Penhalonga

Youth Alive Zimbabwe (YAZIM), working within SASA! Faith¹ strategies has implemented GBV prevention programming in Penhalonga that centres male engagement, faith leadership, and community-level social norms change. Men in Penhalonga were engaged through YAZIM's Men in Action (MIA) Fire Circle curriculum, a SASA! Faith methodology of peer-facilitated sessions for men's groups, delivered by trained Male Community Activists in church halls, community spaces, and informal gathering points such as beer halls and mining sites.

The series of sessions moves men from confronting the pressures and myths that sustain harmful masculinity (Weeks 1–2), through self-reflection, communication, and the redistribution of household power and labour (Weeks 3–5), to mentoring the next generation and taking collective, public accountability for GBV prevention in the wider community (Weeks 6–8). Two couples' sessions (Weeks 9–10) extend the work into joint household decision-making and non-violent communication with

¹ <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/sasa-faith-guide.pdf>

partners. The series culminates in men publicly reciting the MIA Pledge and being integrated into the formal MIA structure and local GBV referral pathways.

2.0 Methodology

The study used a qualitative design grounded in social norms theory and community-based prevention approaches, on the premise that attitudes, power relations, and behaviour change are best understood through participants' own accounts. Data collection combined three methods:

- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with male artisanal miners, women, and adolescent girls, exploring gender relations, power, transactional sex, child marriage, and violence.
- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with faith leaders and community leaders, on their role in shaping and challenging community norms around VAW.
- Community dialogue observations, capturing how SASA! Faith activities were received and discussed in real time.



Fire Circle Sessions: Smaller group discussions – Men from Penhalonga discussing on a Community Conversation Poster

Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, particular attention was paid to informed consent, confidentiality, and referral pathways for participants who disclosed experiences of violence.

3.0 Key Findings

3.1 Mixed-Culture Characteristic of the Mining Workforce

Penhalonga's mining sites have attracted men from different parts of the country, together with some who come from Mozambique. These job seekers and other nomadic miners include the often-aggressive ASM known as 'MaShurugwi', machete-wielding men from Shurugwi who are known to rob, injure, and sometimes kill other miners. Driven by patriarchal and masculine social norms that tolerate their violence, and by intense competition in mining, the MaShurugwi are largely free to inflict GBV without anticipating any negative consequences, with women and girls the worst affected. This tolerance illustrates that men

from different cultural backgrounds in the community and the Penhalonga locals accept violence perpetrated against women as normalised. Penhalonga now has a diluted culture, however, characterized by patriarchal dominance.

3.2 Male Dominance and Sexual Harassment

The ASM sector remains male dominated. In Penhalonga, women who try to access productive mines are cast out on the grounds that their presence in shafts and open-cast pits will cause the gold to 'disappear', a belief that casts them as a cursed group associated with misfortune. Women reported being beaten, sexually harassed, and banned from operating in these areas as a result, with menstruation-related taboos also invoked to relegate them to lower-income activities such as vending, cooking, fetching water for alluvial washing, and sex work.

It is really a challenge for us women to work in, or access, productive mines because men say that if we get into the shafts and open cast pits the gold will disappear, hence portraying us a cursed social group with bad omens and all misfortunes. As a result, when we are caught in these shafts, we are thoroughly beaten, sexually harassed and banned from operating in the area. Men's sexist perceptions of seeing menstruation as a taboo relegate us to the low-income activities such as vending, cooking, fetching water for alluvial washing and commercial sex work. — Female FGD Participant, Old West

They call us all sorts of names but the most painful is how they degrade us by vilifying our vagina as a shameful part to have. Operating in such environments make us feel undressed and we endure stress and depression. Unfortunately, due to poverty, we are left with no option but to painfully endure this daily torture. — Vendor, Penhalonga

3.3 Harmful Masculinities and Economic Insecurity

Respondents linked harmful expressions of masculinity to the frustrations and economic insecurity of mining livelihoods. In cases where unstable mining income disrupted men's ability to provide for their households, most men describe this as intensifying pressure; hence, they resort to asserting control at household level and in the community through other means, like violence and coercive decision-making. These acts are consistent with other research findings that state that abuse of male power and entrenched cultural practice are the leading perceived drivers of GBV in ASM settings.

Unenge wabva kumba ne\$500 uchiti uri kuno Investa kugomba, then wobva wakaviwa wobva wanyura mari yese. Paunodzoka kumba inenge itori hondo. But iwewe Sababa unozongoguma wadzikamisa munhu kana nembama chaiyo. (You would have left home with \$500 to go and invest in a mining shaft, then it doesn't come out as expected and you even lose your investment. Now when you come back home, you know there is going to be a conflict. So the only way to silence her as the father or man in the house is to give her a slap.) — Male FGD Participant

3.4 Transactional Sex as a Survival Strategy

From the study, transactional sex emerged as a recurring theme across all data collection techniques. Transactional sex is described as a survival strategy linked to unstable incomes rather than an isolated behaviour. Key informants described women and adolescent girls as economically vulnerable. This economic vulnerability is a key driver of their exposure to exploitative and coercive relationships within and around mining sites. Some women resort to extramarital affairs as a way of supplementing income. In such scenarios, women and girls in general, and sex workers in particular, have reported that they are more vulnerable to rape by men.

Pamwe pachu unongomanikidzwa kuita bonde wavimbiswa kupihwa mari but mari yacho haimbofi yakauya. Ndopaunozofunga kuti itori Rape case kaiyi? (At times you are forced to have sex after being promised money which never comes. This is when you come to the realisation that this is rape.) — Female FGD Participant

Rates of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) are also high in Penhalonga. The main cause identified is the interaction between teenage girls and gold panners (Makorokoza). CEFM is not seen as a dangerous practice because of prevailing gender norms, with such marriages traditionally accepted as a safety net

for coping with economic insecurities. Poor and vulnerable families, therefore, often marry girls off to the relatively affluent Makorokoza as a way to survive or address their economic challenges.



Fire Circle Sessions: Community Activist conducting a Male Engagement Session using a power poster

3.5 Alcohol Use and Domestic Violence

Participants consistently linked alcohol consumption at mining sites to increased domestic conflict and unsafe sexual practices, a pattern that recurred across both male and female participant groups and is corroborated by regional reporting connecting alcohol and drug use among miners to violent crime and family breakdown.

Many men involved in artisanal mining are drug users. What they do under the influence of alcohol and drugs is regrettable. — Male FGD Participant

FGDs and key informant interviews revealed that miners often rape women when they are under the influence of either drugs or alcohol.

3.6 The Impact of GBV on Women and Girls

GBV has a grievous impact on the wellbeing and rights of women and girls in Penhalonga. Survey respondents reported that GBV survivors have been affected psychologically, others suffered physical injuries, others were sexually harassed, while the majority experienced both physical and emotional harm as a result of GBV in the ASM sector. Study respondents identified perpetrators as fellow male miners, buyers, mine owners, the men hired to provide site security, and, in some cases, police officers.

I know of a young woman who was gang raped and contracted a sexually transmitted infection. Although the case was reported to the police, the culprits have not been brought to justice due to their nomadic nature. She says she has not told any of her relatives but she can't get the horror out of her head up to this day. — Female Participant, Tsvingwe

3.7 The Nexus of Gender-Based Violence, Gendered Power Relations, and Decision-Making

The study confirms entrenched gender inequality across the ASM sector in Penhalonga. FGDs and key informant interviews revealed rigid and conservative traditional cultures and patriarchal norms holding that women should not leave the domestic realm; venturing into ASM is treated as a transgression that is

used to justify GBV against the women who do so. Women who defy these norms by crossing into mainstream, male-dominated livelihoods such as ASM are generally subjected to GBV.

Women's lack of knowledge of, and access to, legal recourse further limits their ability to claim their rights when they experience GBV. Their vulnerability is compounded by limited ownership of small mines, weak representation in mining associations, and the absence of gender-balanced participation in decision-making bodies — rendering women and girls the insignificant 'others' of the ASM sector.

3.8 Effects of the Fire Circle Session Series

Men who progressed through the Fire Circle series described a discernible shift as the sessions moved from self-reflection toward collective action. Early sessions on the pressures of the "Man Box" and on choosing voice over aggression prompted participants to name, often for the first time, the link between economic and social pressure and their own conduct at home. Several men described the household power and shared-labour session as a turning point, translating scripture-based discussion of servant leadership into concrete changes in how domestic and caregiving responsibilities were divided.

By the later sessions, men described taking this reflection outside the household: mentoring sons and younger men toward respect and consent (Session 4), speaking up against peers who condoned violence rather than staying silent (Session 5), and formally joining the MIA structure and local referral pathways as accountable allies (Session 6). Facilitators and participants alike attributed the durability of this shift to the sessions' emphasis on critical reflection and personal, spoken commitment rather than instruction, reinforced by the public recitation of the MIA Pledge at the close of the series. Among couples who took part in the two joint sessions, participants described a shift toward shared household decision-making and calmer, safer communication under tension.

From these sessions, my wife and I have learnt to Plan Together, Play Together and Pray Together.
— **Male Fire Circle Participant**

If love prevails then power can be balanced at home. I have now realized there is no point of trying to prove that I am more powerful than her. I accept that there are some things that she can do better than me. This has helped me and my family to progress; we can now share the tasks at home. —
Male Fire Circle Participant



Fire Circle Sessions: Participants engage with SASA! Faith training materials during a Fire Circle session.

Spouses of men who were consistent in attending the sessions described a parallel shift toward shared household decision-making and calmer, safer communication under tension.

Men also described choosing to mentor their sons and younger men toward respect and consent, and to speak up against peers who condone violence rather than staying quiet, carrying the mentoring and accountability focus into their own households and social circles. During Fire Circle sessions, men described mentoring their sons toward respect and consent. This intergenerational exchange not only reshaped household dynamics but also extended accountability into the next generation. Similarly, adolescent girls in community dialogues challenged taboos around mining participation, while elders reflected on how cultural beliefs had perpetuated exclusion. These conversations created a shared platform where both groups could learn, unlearn, and co-create safer norms.

3.9 The Role of Faith Leaders

Faith leaders who participated described actively challenging religious teachings previously used to justify male dominance and women's silence in the face of violence. This shift, from religious teaching as justification for control to religious teaching as a basis for accountability and non-violence, was described as a turning point by several religious participants.



A Community Activist uses illustrated SASA! Faith materials during a session with Men in Action participants.

4.0 Lessons Learned

- Prevention programming addressing attitudes and norms alone, without acknowledging the economic pressures driving harmful coping strategies such as transactional sex, risks limited traction.
- Faith leaders are powerful, under-utilised entry points for norms change, given their credibility and influence over how religious teaching is interpreted and applied to gender relations.
- Male engagement works best as critical reflection, not instruction. Space for men to reflect on power and accountability, rather than being told what not to do, was central to the shifts described.
- Alcohol availability at mining sites is a direct driver of domestic violence and unsafe sexual practices. Programming should address this explicitly, rather than as a background condition.

- Entrenched patriarchal norms and exclusionary practices in mining reinforce GBV. Tackling these requires not only household-level change but also structural inclusion of women in decision-making bodies and mining associations.
- Dialogues that bring together both the young and the old proved especially beneficial. Elders contributed cultural grounding and authority, while youth challenged harmful practices and offered new perspectives. This dynamic exchange strengthened legitimacy, broke silences around taboo issues, and ensured sustainability of social norms change across generations.

5.0 Recommendations

Programme Design

- Integrate livelihoods support: pair social norms programming with economic strengthening initiatives to reduce reliance on transactional sex and coercive relationships driven by unstable mining incomes.
- Expand faith leader engagement: provide structured opportunities for faith leaders to reinterpret religious teachings in ways that affirm non-violence and gender equality, positioning them as legitimate male-engagement actors.
- Embed intergenerational dialogues: create structured spaces where youth and elders engage together, ensuring harmful norms are challenged across generations and sustainable change is reinforced.
- Adapt male engagement sessions: align session timing and location with mining work patterns to improve participation among artisanal miners.
- Address alcohol availability: incorporate substance use prevention and harm-reduction strategies directly into GBV programming, given its strong link to domestic violence and unsafe sexual practices.

Policy and Coordination

- Strengthen referral pathways: improve coordination between community-based GBV prevention and formal response services (health, legal, psychosocial) to ensure survivors receive timely support.
- Engage mining sector actors: encourage collaboration between mining associations, site management, and GBV prevention actors to address site-specific risks and extend protection beyond community-level programming.
- Promote women's inclusion: advocate for gender-balanced participation in mining associations and decision-making bodies to challenge structural exclusion and reduce GBV risks.

Future Research and Monitoring

- Combine qualitative and quantitative data: track referral uptake, reported incidents, and behaviour change indicators to strengthen the evidence base for scale-up.
- Document intergenerational case studies: capture examples of how youth–elder dialogues shift norms over time, building evidence for replication in other contexts.
- Support multi-year implementation: fund longer programme cycles to allow sustained engagement, as short-term interventions risk superficial change.

6.0 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that social norms programming rooted in faith engagement and male participation can strengthen GBV prevention efforts in high-risk artisanal mining contexts such as Penhalonga. By engaging men in critical reflection on power and accountability, and equipping faith

leaders to challenge harmful interpretations of religious teaching, the SASA! Faith approach appears to have opened space for meaningful shifts in household communication, community accountability, and support for women and girls experiencing violence. The findings support the integration of SASA! Faith within humanitarian protection and community-based GBV prevention strategies targeting mining communities affected by violence, economic instability, and harmful gender norms.

References and Further Reading

The following sources informed the framing of this report and are suggested for readers wishing to explore the SASA! Faith methodology, male engagement approaches, and the social and gender dynamics of artisanal mining in Zimbabwe in greater depth.

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