



Engaging clergy to address  
domestic violence:  
International approaches

# Project dldl/ድልድል

- A research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK
- Project dldl/ድልድል envisions increasing the understanding around the influence of religious beliefs, theology and the clergy in the experience of domestic violence in order to inform the development of more integrated and effective support systems for victims and perpetrators in tradition-oriented religious societies, as well as their international migrant communities.
- Informed by decolonial reflexivity, it aims to prioritise the communities' own understandings and experiences of domestic violence, embed these in wider socio-cultural normative frameworks and context-specific religious and exegetical traditions, and leverage on religio-cultural resources in order to address the problem in the most sensible and practical ways.




# Motivations/aims of webinar

- Clergy are generally influential and well-positioned to respond to domestic violence in religious communities.
- The scholarship agrees that clergy may lack preparedness to respond to victims/survivors and perpetrators with sensitivity to risks. It suggests that clergy need more training to understand the psychology of domestic violence, the theological acumen to address distorted perceptions that involve religious beliefs and contribute to negative beliefs and attitudes, and willingness to collaborate with secular and other stakeholders working to address domestic violence, integrating with wider referral systems.
- Despite numerous clergy-oriented interventions, few studies have assessed the effectiveness of such programmes rigorously and in ways that can evidence the specific mechanisms by which clergy involvement results in positive outcomes for domestic violence victims/survivors and the minimisation of the problem in their communities.
- Today's panel will explore different approaches of engaging with religious communities and clergy in efforts to address domestic violence in different religious contexts with the aim of achieving knowledge exchange across different contexts and to identify good practices (especially in assessing faith-based interventions) and challenges from different communities around the world.

# Meeting logistics

- Please be advised that this session will be recorded and disseminated through the project's media platforms. If you do not wish to be seen, please do keep your cameras turned off at all times.
- You are welcome to post comments and questions in the chat during the presentations. These will be raised at the end of each session.
- You are also welcome to pose your questions directly in the Q&A session at the end of the webinar by opening your microphone and speaking directly.



# Building clergy preparedness to respond to domestic violence in Ethiopia: The approach of project dldl/ድልድል

Dr Romina Istratii

SOAS University of London

PI of Project dldl/ድልድል: “Bridging religious studies, gender & development and public health to address domestic violence: A novel approach for Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK”

# Informed by long-term ethnographic research with Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahədo* clergy

- The project is informed by and builds upon previous ethnographic research with Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahədo* communities in Northern Ethiopia.
- It is guided by findings that showed both a prevalence of religious language in how the clergy and the laity understood and experienced domestic violence in rural and urban communities in the northern region of Tigray, and also the crucial role of the clergy in teaching about marriage and in mediating situations of conflict and abuse.
- While some clergy seemed to lack the preparedness to respond with awareness of the complex psychology of victims and perpetrators, the potential risks involved or the importance of confidentiality, others used theological language resourcefully and in ways that seemed to reverse rigid or pernicious attitudes associated with some forms of conjugal abuse or its implicit tolerance. They also supported victims/survivors materially when it was possible.





*dldl* means 'bridge' in Tigrigna, a term that reflects the project's aim of bridging different disciplines, sectors and stakeholders in order to achieve a more reflexive, decolonial and integrated approach to addressing domestic violence in faith communities

- ◆ The project evolved from previous long-term PhD research in Aksum, Tigray region, Ethiopia, and reflects many years' consultations and discussions with friends and colleagues in Aksum, Mekelle and Addis Ababa.
- ◆ It builds upon old and new partnerships with academic and non-governmental organisations, including Aksum University (Aksum, Ethiopia), the St Frumentius Abba Selama Kessate Berhan Theological College (Mekelle, Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), Diversity Resource International (Brighton, UK) and its sister-branch Waniney (Asmara, Eritrea), the University of Bristol (Bristol, UK) and the University of Sheffield (Sheffield, UK).

# How project dldl/ድልድል works to achieve meaningful impact

- Our main premise is that meaningful and impactful interventions emerge when they are designed from the ground up informed by empirical evidence and real-life experiences.
- The project aims to use sustainable and dialogical strategies in order to ensure continuity, such as by connecting with existing domestic violence infrastructures and systems and avoiding duplication, brokering cross-sectoral learning, partnerships and awareness through knowledge exchange activities and public engagement, working dialogically with partners, stakeholders and communities and employing people-centred research methodologies and practices; and relying on context-specific evidence and developing new understanding.
- We work with the religious departments and bodies that are directly relevant to our work (e.g. EOC DICAC, Mehibere Qedusan, EWLA), ensuring that we are integrated within the existing institutional and referral framework to avoid duplication and to develop working relationships of trust and effective interventions.



# Ongoing and planned activities

## RESEARCH

- Research to understand better how attitudes of domestic violence are informed by religious beliefs and to explore associations with psychological factors (intergenerational violence, trauma, personality disorders, etc.), as well as inform deterrence mechanisms and community/clergy-oriented interventions.
- Research with victims/survivors of domestic violence to explore the role of faith in help-seeking attitudes and to provide faith-informed psychosocial support
- Consultations and research to explore the possibility of a faith-based perpetrator treatment programme

## INTERVENTIONS

- Workshops with clergy including theological, ethnographic and domestic violence safeguarding content to build their preparedness to respond to domestic violence victims and perpetrators appropriately.
- Trainings with secular providers (government and NGOs) to raise awareness of the complex role of religio-cultural parameters in domestic violence continuation and deterrence
- Curriculum development with university and theological college instructors to integrate gender issues and domestic violence in education and clergy training. This includes the development of a course in Gender and Theology and Gender, Development and Religious Studies.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Publication of working papers and hosting a blog to achieve knowledge exchange and to promote cross-sectoral communication and collaboration
- Delivery of regular webinars on specialised topics that are targeted at multiple stakeholders to promote more integrated approaches in domestic violence services provision.
- Production of films to create awareness and improve multi-stakeholder and public understanding of domestic violence and the complex intersections with religious, socio-cultural and psychological parameters.

# Building awareness among clergy through dialogical and reflection-based workshops

- Understanding on the basis of research the needs, challenges and lived experiences of rural and urban clergy and developing material that responds directly to these and can be of immediate relevance to them.
- Developing theological/Patristic content that is based on a thorough study and understanding of the local Church tradition and how this has been received and perceived by clergy and laity.
- Employing dialogical and reflective approaches to help the clergy become more aware of the complexities of domestic violence in their societies, but also to create 'safe spaces' for sharing experiences and lessons openly, complementing existing Church-led trainings.

# Workshop format

- Comprises of presentation components, questions to motivate reflection, discussion and sharing and group activities that use scenarios and case-studies collected during fieldwork with clergy and communities
- Presentation content is crisp and focused to reflect the needs, interests and realities of the clergy (informed by completed/on-going research) and to facilitate information assimilation in real-time



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Building Bridges  
of Faith Against  
Domestic Violence

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## Booklets prepared for clergy participants in Ethiopia

- These include three learning units:
  - a) presentation of ethnographic realities of domestic violence in Ethiopian societies and the role/influence of the clergy (initially based on case-study in Aksum, but increasing incorporating feedback from clergy participants from other contexts)
  - b) teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahädo* Church on gender relations, marriage, conjugal cohabitation and domestic violence complemented by St John Chrysostom's relevant homilies about the same;
  - c) c) information on the legal framework on domestic violence, available referral system and safeguarding information and advice





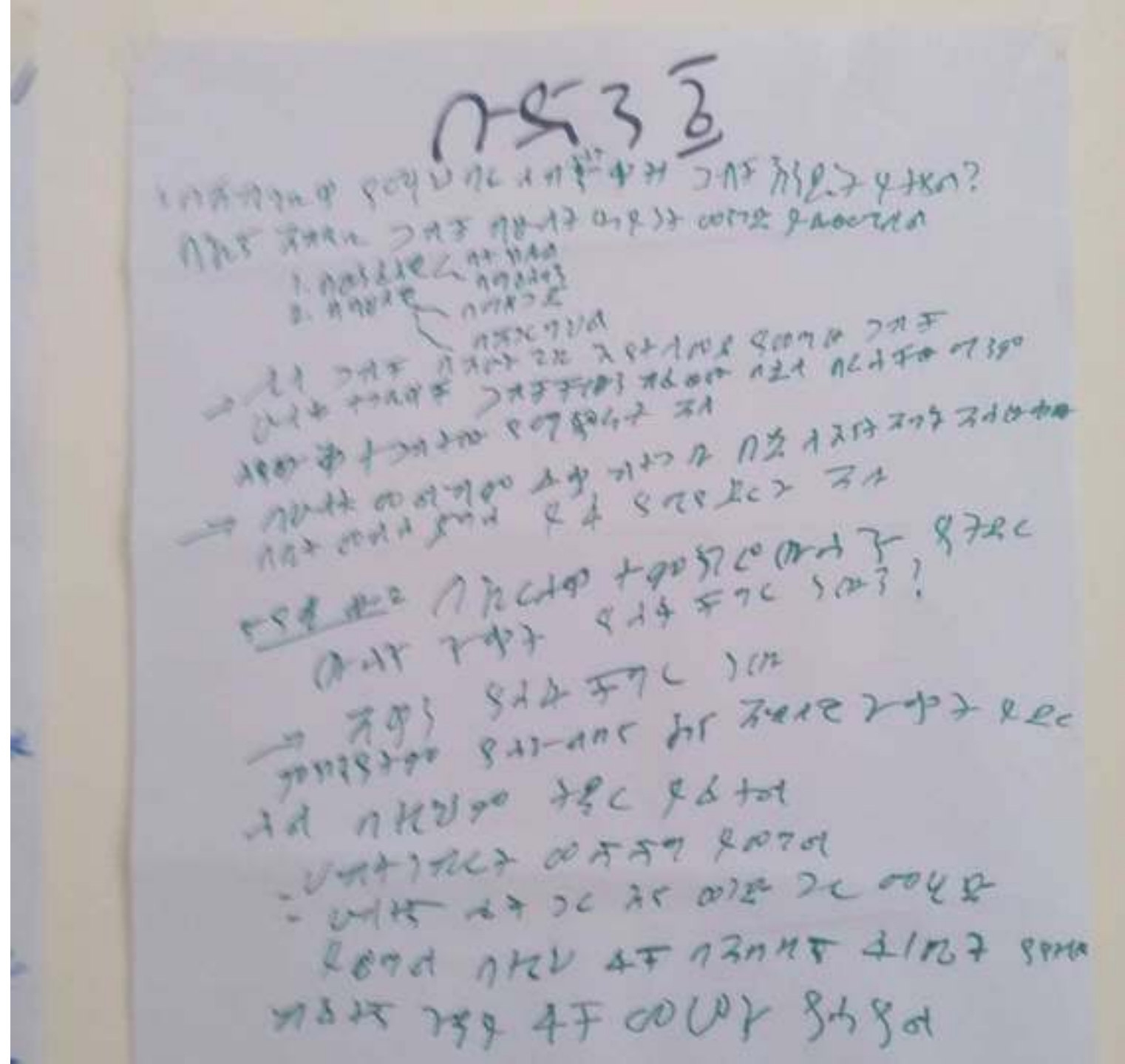






# Two-fold workshop objective

- Group activities serve two purposes:
  - a) create the space for reflection and mutual learning among the participants, and
  - b) serve research purposes as they help us to collect first-hand accounts/experiences from the participants and to integrate those in future workshops to improve their relevance and effectiveness



# Building preparedness of (future) clergy through seminary education

- In the lines of our approach with clergy training, we are working on developing a course that employs theological and Patristic content to train seminary students on gender issues, marriage, domestic cohabitation and abuse.
- These will employ extensive material from the relevant homilies of St John Chrysostom, as well as information on referral systems, the legal framework on domestic violence and safeguarding content.
- The courses will be co-developed with instructors at the partner institutions who specialise and are interested in these topics to ensure that when the project ends and I am not based in Ethiopia, the courses can continue to be taught.

Thank you for joining us today

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- For questions contact [ri5@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ri5@soas.ac.uk)
- Join the mail list **DV-Gender-Faith** on JISCMail for follow-up outputs