



Applying a Decolonial Lens to Research Structures, Norms and Practices in Higher Education Institutions

Conversation Event Report SOAS University of London, 18th September 2019



# Decolonial Subversions



# Project dldl/ድልድል

A 1.2 million research and innovation project funded by UK Research and Innovation under the Future Leaders Fellowship scheme (2020-2024) to promote and develop theology-informed, culturally-appropriate responses to domestic violence in Ethiopia and the UK.

The project's approach is informed by a decolonial understanding of historical inequalities in the system governing research and development and of the marginalisation of religious knowledge in a highly secularised technoscientific paradigm.

#### The project aims to:

- Build evidence, develop research-informed interventions and strengthen local infrastructures in domestic violence prevention and response in collaboration with and through existing response mechanisms in Ethiopia.
- Feed this evidence and practical knowledge to the UK domestic violence sector so that the latter can cater effectively to migrant, ethnic minority communities in faith-sensitive and culturally-appropriate ways.









#### Project dldl/ድልድል: A research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in Ethiopia and the UK

Dr Romina Istratii - SOAS, University of London

How Do We Work?

A decolonial impact-oriented approach: Our main premise is that meaningful and impactful interventions emerge when they are designed from the ground

#### What is project dldl/ድልድል?

Project dldl/£a£a is a research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in Ethiopia and the UK. The project seeks to promote a decolonial approach to addressing domestic violence in religious communities by engaging substantively with the religio-cultural belief systems of the victims/survivors and the perpetrators, and by understanding how these belief systems interface with gender, material and psychological parameters to facilitate or deter domestic violence. Working with Ethiopian and Eritrean collaborators, and rural and urban communities, the project seeks to generate new research and intervention approaches, and to apply this knowledge to inform strategies for integrating in domestic violence services and better-supporting affected ethnic minority and migrant populations in the UK.

**Impact** 

victims & nernetr

#### **Strategies**

1. Working dialogically wit

#### **Outcomes**

tudies, development & public

2. Bespoke curricula for seminarians & multilingual training platform for

#### Who is involved in the project?

The project works through partnerships with academic and nongovernmental organisations in the project countries, 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), EMIRTA Research, Training and Development Centre (Ethiopia), the University of Bristol (Bristol, UK) and the University of Sheffield (Sheffield,



- 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.).
- Research to identify how reliaious beliefs can serve as a deterrent to becoming abusive or as a coping and healing mechanism for perpetrators and victims/survivors respectively.
- Research to explore the effectiveness of faith-based interventions internationally and to develop a faithbased perpetrator treatment programme.
- Research to understand the level of integration of religio-cultural parameters in secular domestic violence sectors and to identify ways to improve integration as a bridge across disciplines, sectors and stakeholders

**ENGAGEMENT & INTEGRATION** 



- Workshops with clergy to provide them with theological, ethnographic and safeguarding training to respond to domestic violence better.
- Workshops with secular providers (government and non-governmental organisations, social workers, psychologists, etc.) to raise awareness about the complex role of religio-cultural parameters in domestic violence and how to integrate those constructively in their own work.
- Curriculum development with university and theology instructors to integrate gender issues and domestic violence in education and clergy training and preparation for service.
- Partnerships with constituent organisations, including religious bodies, government and domestic violence providers to strenathen existing infrastructure

#### up informed by empirical evidence and real-life experiences **KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE**



- Communication of research results to relevant stakeholders through meetings and personal outreach.
- Publication of working papers and a blog to achieve knowledge exchange and to promote crosssectoral collaboration.
- Delivery of regular webinars and international conferences on specialised topics that are targeted at multiple stakeholders to promote more integrated approaches to domestic violence.
- Production of films to create awareness and improve multistakeholder and public understanding of domestic violence and the complex intersections with religious, sociocultural, psychological and migration-related parameters.

#### Milestones achieved so far

- 2 literature reviews completed (1 academic paper published)
- 4 language translations on the website published
- 5 working papers published
- 6 international webinars and 1 international conference organised in 2020-2022
- 7 workshops on domestic violence with cleray delivered in Ethiopia in 2021
- 133 members subscribed on the project's multistakeholder platform
- 155 clergy trained on domestic violence in 2021
- **30,000+** web page views since April 2021



#### Follow Us/Subscribe

- Home Project dldl/ድልድል
- Vimeo Account
- DV-Gender-Faith mailing list

Academic communities

Clergy and seminarians

DV State practitioners bureaucrats Communitie

# The project responds to an unequal knowledge system

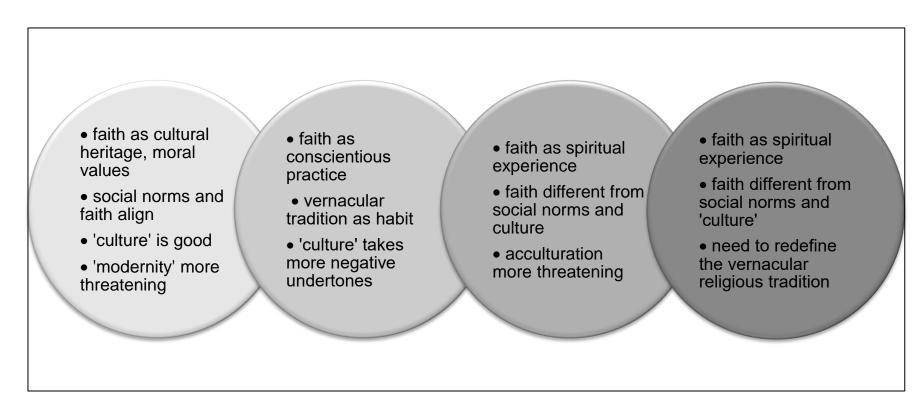
- Dominance of English language in teaching and published research, which favours Anglophone standards of knowledge production (language and epistemology are interlinked).
- Western Euro-centric standards of knowledge validation, research excellence and impact, as seen in citation politics, peer review norms and modes/forms of knowledge production & sharing.
- Research funding distribution, funding priorities, eligibility criteria, data management laws and due diligence expectations favouring Northern academics (especially those in elite institutions).
- Geographic distribution of publishing houses, with most high-impact journals being Northern, perpetuating western Euro-centric publication metrics (journal indexing and citations).
- Unreflexive research methodologies and practices (ethnocentric theorisation and interpretation of research concepts and findings, inequitable practices vis-à-vis research participants, research assistants or research practices, extractionist models of research).

# The project responds to long-term anthropological research in Ethiopia

- The project is informed by and builds upon previous year-long ethnographic research with Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahado* communities in Northern Ethiopia.
- The research showed a prevalence of religious language in how the clergy and the laity understood and experienced domestic violence in rural and urban communities, and in particular, the interface of religious and cultural discourse in maintaining social norms and gender standards associated with some forms of conjugal abuse or the tolerance/continuation of the problem.
- Clergy were found to be central in family life and in mediating conjugal conflict. 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.
- The research showed that while gender,-related, socio-cultural, material and spiritual parameters influenced how
  domestic violence was understood and experienced locally, those could not fully capture the complex reasons behind
  domestic violence, raising the need to integrate better psychological parameters and trauma-informed theories in the
  analysis of the problem.



# Spectrum representing local understandings of the religion/culture relationship and attitudes toward social norms



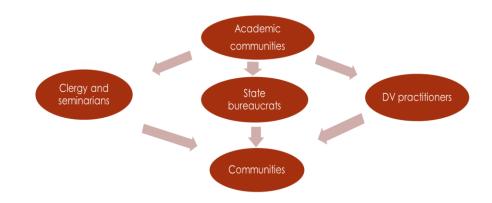
Source: Istratii, R. (2020) *Adapting Gender and Development to Local Religious Contexts*. Routledge (not to be reproduced without copyright permission)

# The importance of integrating psychological parameters in faith-sensitive research and interventions

- There was a visible tendency among people in the community to rationalise certain forms of abusiveness by invoking the individual (male) personality with reference to spiritual forces that suggested an inevitability, and thus an implicit kind of tolerance, of male abusiveness.
- These aetiologies of abusiveness reflected also more empirical observations that some men behaved in ways that socio-cultural, family or environmental parameters could not explain. These behavioural issues have been captured in psychological studies of abuse, drawing from attachment theory, intergenerational violence and trauma-informed theoretical approaches, pointing to the need for a psychology-informed approach to addressing conjugal abuse in the community.

# Project dldl/ድልድል: Serving as a bridge across disciplines, sectors and stakeholders

- Working in silos not effective as responding to gender inequalities and domestic violence requires multisectoral approaches
- Preconceptions, generalisations and ideological agendas create barriers to understanding and collaboration across sectors, and especially between secular and religious institutions (the divide itself is blurred)
- Aim to serve as a bridge across different theoretical approaches, but especially integrate psychological theories of violence in sociological analyses that can foster interdisciplinary understandings of the problem and integrated responses to it





#### About the logo:

Designed with the help of graphic designed Daniel Desta Hluf in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The project is signified with the word dldl/ድልድል, which translates as 'bridge' in Tigrigna language.

The word encapsulates our objective to bridge different disciplines, sectors and stakeholders to achieve a more genuinely collaborative and integrated approach for addressing domestic violence in diverse religio-cultural contexts.

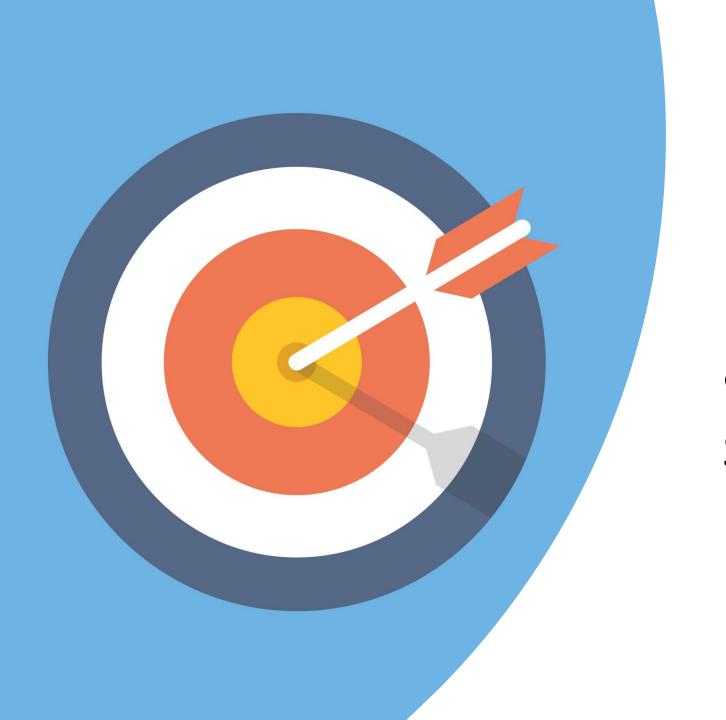
The logo was designed to communicate the solemn problem of domestic violence and our objectives to work in good faith across religious and secular stakeholders to address it. The white arch symbolises the bridge we aim to be across these different sectors and stakeholder groups. The colour red, as the colour of blood, conveys the pain and damage resulting from domestic violence, while the black leaves on the branches remind tears of pain. From the bridge grow sturdy branches, symbolising hope and movement upwards. The branches intersect across each other, representing the collaborations and connections we aim to create through this project to achieve more integrated domestic violence support systems in the diverse religious communities we work with.

### Committed to a decolonial impact-oriented approach

- We depart from historical approaches in gender-sensitive and domestic violence research that have defined or theorised gender relations or domestic violence in western European or other ethnocentric ways.
- We also depart from established epistemologies of 'religion' that have been informed by western societies' experience with religion, theological dogmatism and secularisation processes.
- We seek to reverse the knowledge transfer in international development and public health interventions, whereby knowledge, paradigms and standards have been defined in the West and imposed to the rest by fostering Southern-Northern knowledge exchange and genuine collaboration.
- We avoid rigidly predefining what impact should look like and aim to prioritise what stakeholders and communities understand as impactful interventions in their respective contexts.

Using innovative, cross-sector, multilingual, locallyappropriate methodologies

- Employing multilingual, communitygrounded and participatory approaches that can allow us to understand the life of the communities and to build genuine trust and communication.
- Employing interactive, visual and other innovative research methods to adapt to the conditions and needs of the local population and to achieve more inclusivity.
- Working through a diverse team of researchers from different religio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds who are supported with training to be able to lead research activities and to participate actively in data analysis and the publishing process.



Major achievements so far (select)

Training 155 Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahədo clergy and holding interfaith meeting

- Completed a series of workshops with Ethiopian
   Orthodox clergy to build their preparedness to respond
   to domestic violence by means of theological,
   psychological and safeguarding knowledge.
- Over the period of a year, 155 members of the clergy were recruited and trained from the town of Debre Birhan and surroundings in Amhara region, Ethiopia.
- Following the completion of the pilot, an interfaith meeting was held with religious leaders from all other religious groups represented in the region and with the local government bodies supporting the project to explore how the pilot programme could be expanded to other communities.
- Programme and evaluation report published.
- Materials produced integrated in other GBV programmes of partner organisation EOTC DICAC.



Research on domestic violence with male participants using visual methods

- Completed research to explore how men rationalised domestic violence and abuse and how religious language and beliefs were invoked by men to justify or condemn domestic violence or to deter abusiveness.
- The research was also designed to serve as an intervention using interactive virtual methods to raise-awareness and to help the male participants envision possible deterrence mechanisms.
- Interactive surveys and scenario exercises were completed with 72 male participants recruited from the areas surroundings of Debre Birhan in Amhara region, Ethiopia.
- Programme report is being finalised and will be published in Jan-Feb 2023.



A podcast series on domestic violence in Amharic and English

- 4 episodes were recorded
- Broadcast on Soundcloud
- Close to 300 listens achieved despite Soundcloud not being widely used in Ethiopia

A film to raise awareness on the role of faith in domestic violence in Ethiopia

- Collaborated with a UK-based and an Ethiopiabased production company to produce a multilingual docudrama on domestic violence in Ethiopia.
- The film's storyline is a collation of stories and testimonies of real people as they were communicated to Dr Istratii in her previous anthropological research in Northern Ethiopia.
- Dr Istratii has been working with the producers in Ethiopia to move from pre-production to film production stage.
- Film (which will be multilingual) to be released in March-April 2023 (to allow for possible festival nominations).



Annual hybrid international conference to promote integrated responses in the country and internationally

- The first two years of the project culminated in the Project dldl/ድልድል Annual Conference, which was organised physically in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 11-12 November 2022 with the option for UK speakers and audiences to join online.
- The Project dldl/ድልድል Annual Conference was co-organised with project partner EMIRTA/እምርታ Research, Training and Development Institute to promote cross-sectoral collaborations.
- Over 60 physical participants joined from different parts of Ethiopia and internationally. Presentations by Ethiopian, UK and international speakers were combined with a series of workshops delivered by international specialists from the UK, USA, Kenya and other countries.
- Conference featured on Ethiopian news.
- Post-conference report and recordings will be released next week.
- Conference proceedings publication is envisioned for early next year.



# International conference in Ethiopia

Media coverage (in Amharic): የቤት ውስጥ ጥቃትን ለመከልከል - YouTube

# Objectives

#### Year 3 objectives

- •Identify the level of integration of religio-cultural sensitivity in current operational approaches and practices in the UK domestic violence sector
- •Increase understanding of migrant communities' attitudes and responses to domestic violence through direct engagement with East African and other migrant communities in the UK
- Develop online course materials for Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox seminarians and enhance their preparedness to respond to domestic violence

2022-2023

2023-2024

#### Year 4 objectives

- •Extend the pilot project to Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and other religious communities in the UK by connecting researchers, theologians and practitioners and setting up future collaborative strategies
- •Use the improved understanding to develop an online toolkit for community organisations, religious personnel and domestic violence referral and perpetrator services to improve religio-cultural sensitivity for more effectiveness
- Explore new accreditation standards that assess religio-cultural sensitivity in domestic violence services provision in the UK

# Main activities

Desk Review and Key Information consultations: Aims to identify current understanding and major questions/debates around integrating religio-cultural sensitivity in DV services provision

Research with ethnic minority and migrant religious communities: Seeks to understand from the experience and perspective of members of migrant communities the extent to which DV is an issue in each community and if/how this is being addressed

Survey: Will explore DV providers' perspectives around engaging with religious and cultural diversity in their work and to identify how different providers (secular, community-based, religious) view barriers and opportunities to collaboration and integration across types of providers.

Online toolkit for community organisations, religious personnel and domestic violence referral and perpetrator services to improve religio-cultural sensitivity for more effectiveness.

Theological materials to respond to DV in each community we work with.

Workshops held with each stakeholder group to disseminate evidence and to train appropriately and as needed.

A film produced in the UK on the topic of domestic violence, faith and migration

# Translating the evidence into practice



### Programme overview and evaluation approach

- A total of 155 clergy from Debre Berhan and the surrounding areas were organised and delivered.
- The delivery of the pilot series was followed by a series of four 'refresher' trainings involving the
  original 155 trained clergy, in response to emerging evidence that the clergy required continuous
  support and needed to be reminded of the material as well as receive support with new
  questions that emerged in their pastoral practice.
- Each workshop ended with the distribution of assessment questionnaires to the participants, who were asked to answer seven questions that reviewed the workshop format and content.
- The 'refresher' trainings were also used as a platform to obtain the participants' feedback many months after their participation in the pilot training and to collect their suggestions on how the programme could continue after the completion of the pilot phase to sustain its positive effects.







## Collaborators

- The Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahado* Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOTC DICAC) was ideally positioned to facilitate the delivery of these workshops, having established relations with clergy training centres and diocese offices across Ethiopia.
- The collaboration ensured that the Church remained involved in the development and implementation of this intervention, providing the research and delivery team with access to theological expertise and ecclesial support in the development of the intervention and communication with clergy and laity, as well as benefiting directly from the learnings and outputs of the intervention.
- The development and delivery of the workshop content was also reviewed and supported by the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association(EWLA), which have been at the forefront of pushing for domestic violence-related legislation and developing community-based referral systems to support domestic violence victims and survivors in the country.



# Workshop structure/components

- Each workshop included presentations on:
- domestic violence definitions, realities and attitudes in the community;
- theological training employing Church teachings and Patristic responses to marriage-related issues; and
- safeguarding training and education on domestic violence laws in the country.

#### Background

#### Component 1: Understanding the lived experiences of domestic violence in the countryside and the role of the clergy in the continuation and deterrence of the problem

Understandings of domestic violence

Conjugal abuse explanations and causes

A combination of positive and negative aspects and practices

The role of faith in marriage

Local beliefs about bahri (human personality) that contributed to the problem

The role of the clergy in the local society

The clergy's mediation practices in marriage

Key messages

#### Component 2: Theological training on Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahado Church teachings on marriage, divorce and domestic violence and St John Chrysostom's homilies about the

Understanding the historical development of the Orthodox faith

The meaning of the Orthodox faith

**EOTC** teachings on Man-Woman Relations

EOTC baptismal differences and their theological justification

EOTC teachings on the Holy Matrimony

EOTC teaching on the age of marriage

EOTC teachings on the aims of marriage

EOTC teachings on 'Oneness' in marriage

EOTC teachings on gender roles and division of labour

EOTC teachings on male headship

EOTC teachings on domestic violence

EOTC teachings on sexual relations

#### The Teachings of St John Chrysostom on Gender Relations, Marriage and Domestic Violence

On man and woman being created alike

On the aim of marriage

On marriage as another way to salvation

Against family interference

What 'to submit' really means

What male headship really means

On spousal abuse

When separation is advised

#### What Makes a Good Teacher: Learning from St. John Chrysostom

- a) Understanding Orthodox marriage and how to teach about it
- b) Listening attentively and responding sensitively c) Being a good example in their own married lives
- d) Understanding their limitations and working with others

#### Component 3: Safeguarding training to support domestic violence victims and perpetrators appropriately

Legal framework on domestic violence in Ethiopia

Domestic violence referral services to be aware of

How to support domestic violence victims and perpetrators with an understanding of safety risks for victims and safeguarding protocols

Understanding the psychology of perpetrators Understanding the psychology of victims and survivors

How to mediate conjugal abuse situations

Concrete steps to take when a victim reports intimate partner violence

Concrete steps to approach a perpetrator

Key take-away message

# Developing the theological materials

- Some of the work of St John Chrysostom, a 3<sup>rd/</sup>4<sup>th</sup> century saint, has been accessible in Ethiopia: Dərsan (ድርሳን) and Tägsaṣ́ (ተግሳፅ), some excerpts mentioned in Haymanotä 'Abbäw (ሃይጣኖት አበው) and more recent translations from English. Not all homilies and in particular those referring to marriage were historically translated in full as emphasis was placed on the saint's works on asceticism.
- Dr Romina Istratii compiled related homilies on marriage and translated from the original ancient Greek into Amharic, checking with Ge'ez theological terminology, with the help of theologians Mr Elias Gebrselassie and Mr Fresenbet Adhanom in Ethiopia. The translated material was reviewed also by theologians Ms Selam Reta, and Mr Girma Batu.
- Lastly the material was reviewed by EOTC DICAC experts, including Memher Aklil Damtew, and obtained the approval of Bishop Samuel who oversees EOTC DICAC.

## Workshop format

- The workshops were designed to be culturally appropriate and were delivered in Amharic by Dr Romina Istratii and two trainers, a certified psychologist and EOTC deacon, Mr Henok Hailu, and a practising attorney affiliated with EWLA, Ms Bezaweet Birhanu.
- Each workshop was delivered over two half-days to avoid tiring and overwhelming the
  participants and to allow them the time to reflect on the content.
- The three unit presentations were intercut by dialogical and reflective approaches to help the clergy become more aware of the complexities of domestic violence in society, but also to create a platform for them to share experiences, complementing more top-down Church-led trainings.





### Participant testimonies

"I found it to be useful in opening doors for teaching, in the future, to advance knowledge, create awareness. It has highly achieved it." (C22, W2)

"I gained enough awareness regarding the psychological and physical abuse against women in marriage." (C17, W2)

"Training for priests on (how to consult) married couples is very much needed because spiritual children are very close to the priest. It is good if the training continues in the future." (C16, W1)

"We have learned valuable lessons on how to deal with domestic violence, child marriage, family interference in marriage, and conflict resolution." (C15, W6)

### Participant testimonies (cont.)

"I will present this workshop well at home as well as in church. I will teach it at every edir, traditional associations as well as funeral services." (C18, W5)

"Starting from myself, it made me an example and a person who respects my wife as well as other women in society." (C10, W1)

"Yes, because most of the time when there is physical abuse, we used to try to solve the situation (via direct interference). But now I understood that time should be given (to assess the situation)." (C23, W4)



# How to become involved/engage with us:

- You may support the objectives of the project by sharing the resources available on the website with clergy, seminarians, counsellors, social workers, researchers, and practitioners and other stakeholders who work in addressing domestic violence in diverse religious and cultural contexts. See our Resources page: Resources Project dldl/ድልድል
- Submit a blog essay to the project's dedicated blog, which aims to facilitate the sharing of new knowledge and experience around the project's thematic areas. For details, please see the Blog Guidelines. The blog accepts submissions in all languages and in diverse formats, including audio and visual. See our Blog page: Blog Project dldl/ድልድል
- Subscribe to the project's discussion group **DV-Gender-Faith**, which is intended for domestic violence practitioners, researchers and religious stakeholders to share new research, training materials and experiences, in order to build good practices together and to promote better-integrated approaches to addressing domestic violence within religious communities. Subscribe here: JISCMail DV-GENDER-FAITH List at WWW.JISCMAIL.AC.UK

## Creating connections with our project and network

- Project dldl/ድልድል aims to create meaningful impact by integrating its activities within international, national and local initiatives and by creating opportunities for knowledge sharing across stakeholder communities in the countries and regions it works in. Considering listing your organisation on our Connections page: Connections Project dldl/ድልድል
- Knowledge sharing opportunities may include participation in webinars, annual conferences, and physical workshops if you are members of the stakeholder groups we engage with. Next annual conference will be in the UK in 2024.

## Follow us on different platforms:

- Visit <u>projectdIdI.org</u> to learn more about the project and access our resources libraries and blog (in English, Amharic, Tigrigna and Afaan Oromo)
- Follow us on <u>LinkedIn</u> for brief project announcements and outputs (English)
- Follows us on <u>Soundcloud</u> to access relevant podcasts (in Amharic and English)
- Follow us on <u>Vimeo</u> for webinar and conference content (English)