Learning for Scale: Insights from the Becoming One Program

Executive Summary

This document outlines the Learning Agenda for the Becoming One program, one of IPA's Best Bets to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) and strengthen couple relationships through a counseling program delivered by faith leaders. It defines the program's next phase of learning: how to adapt, deliver, and sustain impact as it scales across countries and contexts.

Becoming One is a 12-session, faith-based counseling program that equips couples with skills to build healthier, more equitable relationships. Delivered by trained faith leaders using illustrated guides and videos, the program helps couples improve communication, share financial decisions, practice emotional regulation, and strengthen mutual respect, consent, and intimacy. A randomized evaluation supported by IPA in Uganda showed that the program significantly reduced IPV, improved relationship quality, and shifted household power dynamics toward greater gender equity.

As a Best Bet, Becoming One represents a proven, high-potential intervention at the midpoint between early evidence and full-scale implementation. It combines a strong evidence base with committed partners—such as World Vision and the International Rescue Committee's Airbel Impact Lab, among others—but still requires adaptive learning, operational testing, and resource mobilization to reach sustained scale.

The Learning Agenda is a structured plan to guide that learning. It identifies the key evidence gaps and operational questions that must be addressed to maintain effectiveness while expanding. It also outlines how IPA and partners will test and refine implementation models, digital delivery options, cost structures, and institutional integration strategies to ensure Becoming One remains impactful and sustainable.

Through this agenda, IPA seeks to generate actionable insights for governments, donors, and implementing partners interested in evidence-based approaches to preventing IPV and promoting gender-equitable relationships. The goal is to ensure that Becoming One continues to deliver measurable, lasting impact as it moves from successful pilots toward global scale.

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1. Introduction and Purpose

Over the past two decades, a growing body of rigorous evidence has deepened global understanding of what works to reduce poverty and improve well-being. Yet, only a limited number of proven interventions have achieved meaningful scale. To bridge the gap between research and large-scale implementation, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) launched the Best Bets Initiative -a framework for identifying evidence-based programs with strong results, high potential for expansion, and credible pathways to sustainability.

Within this initiative, Becoming One stands out as a promising model for preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) and strengthening couple relationships through a counseling program delivered by faith leaders. Its demonstrated impact, reasonable cost, and partnerships across faith-based and development organizations position it as one of IPA's Best Bets for impact at scale.

This Learning Agenda serves as a roadmap for the next phase of evidence generation and adaptation. It outlines the key questions IPA and its partners aim to answer to ensure Becoming One remains effective, scalable, and sustainable across diverse cultural and operational contexts. The agenda builds on lessons from Uganda - where the program has shown substantial impact - and frames a structured plan to guide continuous learning as the model expands to new settings.

By consolidating existing insights and defining clear learning priorities, this document aims to:

- Strengthen understanding of how Becoming One can be adapted to new contexts while preserving its core components and impact;

- Identify the operational systems and support structures required for scale; and

- Inform strategic partnerships and investment decisions that enable sustained, evidence-based delivery at scale.

Ultimately, this Learning Agenda positions Becoming One as an evidence-based intervention that uses continuous learning and adaptation to preserve effectiveness while enhancing feasibility across diverse contexts, ensuring that scale is achieved without compromising measurable impact.

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2. The Becoming One Program

Becoming One is a 12-session counseling program delivered by faith leaders designed to strengthen couple relationships and reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) against women. The program engages couples through structured, guided sessions that promote communication, emotional regulation, shared financial decision-making, and mutual respect. Using illustrated workbooks and videos, faith leaders facilitate discussions that help couples build practical skills to foster equality, trust, and healthy intimacy.

A randomized evaluation (RCT) supported by IPA in rural Uganda found that Becoming One significantly reduced IPV, improved relationship quality, and shifted household power dynamics toward greater gender equity. Twelve months after implementation, couples participating in the program reported more equitable decision-making, improved emotional connection, and fewer instances of physical and emotional violence.

These results demonstrate Becoming One's potential to deliver measurable, transformative impact through trusted community networks. By combining faith-based facilitation with evidence-based behavioral approaches, the program reaches couples in contexts where religion plays a central role in shaping norms, beliefs, and family practices.

Why Becoming One is a Best Bet

IPA identified Becoming One as a Best Bet because it meets three core criteria for scale:

- **Strong evidence of effectiveness:** A rigorous RCT demonstrated reductions in IPV and improvements in relationship well-being.

- **Meaningful and wide-reaching impact:** The program targets drivers of violence and inequality that affect millions of households and communities.

- **Established partnerships and potential for scale:** Collaboration with organizations such as World Vision, the International Rescue Committee's Airbel Lab, International Care Ministries (ICM) ensures both institutional reach and technical rigor.

As a Best Bet, Becoming One represents an intervention at the critical middle stage of the evidence-to-scale pathway. The program has demonstrated effectiveness and is backed by credible partners, yet requires continued adaptation, learning, and investment to sustain impact and expand globally.

![ipa logo] **Innovations for Poverty Action**

Human-Centered Design Approach

Becoming One has been developed and refined using a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach that places participants at the center of every design and implementation decision. HCD emphasizes empathy, iteration, and co-creation, ensuring that solutions are shaped by the lived experiences of the people they aim to benefit.

From the outset, IPA engaged two primary groups in the design process:

- **Faith leaders**, who facilitate the sessions and serve as trusted community figures; and

- **Couples**, whose relationships and experiences the program seeks to improve.

Through repeated testing, feedback sessions, and field observations, the program evolved to better align with participants' realities. Content, facilitation tools, and delivery strategies were adapted based on continuous input, guided by the principle that "we are not who we are designing for." This approach ensured that every component - from the tone of discussions to the visual design of materials - was grounded in user insight rather than external assumptions.

Embedding learning into each phase has allowed Becoming One to maintain fidelity while adapting to different settings. Each iteration has built upon previous lessons, integrating user feedback, testing new delivery models, and refining training systems to improve both effectiveness and feasibility at scale.

Strategic Partnerships

Learning and implementation have been made possible through a multi-disciplinary network of partners, each contributing specific expertise to design, delivery, and evidence generation:

- **World Vision:** Leads on-the-ground implementation in Uganda and Kenya. In Uganda, it has worked through the Church of Uganda to scale the program to over 20 church dioceses in different regions of the country. In Kenya, its multi-denominational presence allows engagement with a broader range of Christian communities.

- **International Rescue Committee's Airbel Impact Lab:** Led the application of HCD methods, tailoring the curriculum and facilitation model to local contexts.

- **Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA):** Acts as the research and learning partner, leading the program's impact evaluation and ensuring technical rigor, program fidelity, and evidence-based decision-making as the program scales, including recent collaboration with International Care Ministries (ICM) as a pathway to scale.

Together, these partnerships combine research, implementation, and faith-based networks to support Becoming One's learning journey from early validation to sustained scale.

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4. What We've Learned So Far

Since its inception, Becoming One has evolved through iterative design, testing, and implementation. Each phase has generated valuable lessons that have strengthened the program's design, delivery model, and pathways to scale.

4.1 PILOT PHASE (2017–2019): EARLY VALIDATION AND ADAPTATION

The pilot in Northern Uganda involved 35 faith leaders, the International Rescue Committee, and World Vision. IPA observed sessions, conducted interviews, and held weekly synthesis meetings to refine the curriculum and facilitation methods.

Key learnings:

- Christian values were central to participants' lives and needed to be integrated into program content.
- Faith leaders had varying literacy levels, requiring simplified materials and visual aids.
- Weekly sessions with small groups (around 10 couples) were most feasible.
- Discussions on sexual topics required cultural adaptation to ensure comfort and openness.

Program adaptations:

- Developed illustrated materials and improved translations for different literacy levels.
- Adjusted sexual topics content to reflect cultural norms while maintaining accuracy.
- Shifted from twice-weekly to weekly sessions to improve attendance and engagement.
- Worked with faith leaders to increase male participation through flexible scheduling and accessible venues.

A key insight from this phase was the variation in faith leaders' facilitation capacity and community influence - prompting closer attention to faith leader quality in subsequent phases.

4.2 RANDOMIZED EVALUATION (2018–2019): MEASURING IMPACT AND REFINING SELECTION

The randomized evaluation expanded to three districts in Western Uganda, involving 140 faith leaders and 1,680 couples. IPA used session audits, attendance records, and surveys at baseline, midline, and endline to analyze which factors drove impact.

Key learnings:

- Faith leaders' pre-intervention gender-progressive views and program fidelity were the strongest predictors of impact.
- Leaders who consistently followed the curriculum and modeled equitable gender attitudes achieved greater reductions in IPV and improvements in relationship quality.

Program adaptations:

- Introduced a gender-progressiveness assessment to identify and recruit faith leaders with gender-equitable attitudes.
- Enhanced ongoing supervision and refresher sessions to strengthen fidelity and delivery quality.

4.3 SCALING PHASE IN UGANDA (2022–PRESENT): SUSTAINING IMPACT AT SCALE

Following national rollout, IPA and partners have continued to learn and document what it takes to sustain impact as the program scales. Weekly coordination meetings, feedback from church leadership, and field observations have shaped ongoing adaptations.

Key learnings:

- Urban contexts require flexible formats: Participants often prefer hybrid or digital options over weekly in-person sessions.
- Training content should prioritize facilitation skills rather than information delivery.
- Printing and long training sessions are major cost drivers; partnerships for bulk printing can reduce costs.
- Institutional ownership is critical for sustainable and cost-effective implementation: when implementing partners adopt the program as their own and embed it within existing structures and systems, delivery becomes more efficient, effective, and impactful. In contrast, implementation that sits outside institutional systems and lacks buy-in risks higher costs, weaker fidelity, and reduced long-term impact.

Program adaptations:

- Piloting online and hybrid delivery models to reach urban audiences.
- Refining training design to focus on facilitation skills and shorten faith leader training duration.
- Partnering with the Church of Uganda to formally integrate the curriculum into theological education (initial approvals of the curriculum have been received).

5. The Learning Agenda: Key Questions and Priorities

As Becoming One transitions from national scale in Uganda to broader implementation across countries, IPA and partners are committed to continued learning. The goal is to ensure the program remains effective, adaptable, and sustainable in diverse contexts.

This Learning Agenda organizes future research and adaptation around six core learning areas. Each area identifies critical questions to guide the next phase of implementation, evidence generation, and operational improvement.

5.1 CONTEXTUAL ADAPTATION

While Becoming One has demonstrated strong results in Uganda, further testing is needed to understand how it performs in different cultural, religious, and social settings.

Learning questions:

- How can different contexts recruit and retain faith leaders who hold gender-equitable views?
- What level of cultural and religious adaptation is required beyond translation and imagery updates?
- Can the program be adapted for non-Christian or secular audiences while maintaining impact?
- How does the group size, session frequency, and location affect engagement and outcomes?

5.2 OPERATIONAL NEEDS AT SCALE

Effective implementation and scaling depends on faith leaders' ability to consistently deliver the program with quality and fidelity across multiple cohorts. Sustained impact requires ongoing support systems and cost-effective delivery mechanisms.

Learning questions:

- What are the most efficient and sustainable systems for training, supervising, and supporting faith leaders?
- Can faith leaders charge small fees for materials to enhance ownership without excluding vulnerable participants?
- What mechanisms can enable real-time feedback and troubleshooting without costly meetings?
- How can printing, distribution, and coordination costs be reduced at scale?
- What incentives motivate long-term faith leader engagement?

A key lesson from scaling so far is that sustained program quality requires a dedicated implementation team with consistent field presence and real-time support.

5.3 DIGITAL IMPLEMENTATION

To reach urban populations and younger couples, Becoming One is exploring digital and hybrid delivery models. However, maintaining the program's depth and interpersonal quality requires iterative research.

Learning questions:

- Which components are best delivered in person versus online?
- How can digital tools reinforce session content and encourage home practice?
- What strategies sustain engagement and accountability in hybrid formats?
- What infrastructure and partnerships are needed for equitable digital access?

5.4 EXTENDED TRAINING VS. TARGETED RECRUITMENT

Findings indicated that faith leaders who already hold gender-progressive beliefs deliver stronger results. Future learning could explore investment in training versus targeted recruitment.

Learning questions:

- Is it more effective to provide longer, more intensive training to a broad pool of faith leaders or selectively target and recruit those with existing gender-equitable attitudes?
- How do cost, scalability, and long-term impact differ between these two approaches?
- Can targeted recruitment models maintain diversity and reach across denominations and geographies?

5.5 MONITORING AND FEEDBACK FOR IMPLEMENTATION QUALITY

Maintaining fidelity and quality across multiple cohorts requires real-time monitoring and feedback systems.

Learning questions:

- What are the most effective and low-cost tools to track program delivery and identify where support is needed?
- How can peer-led supervision models, such as Becoming One Champions, strengthen accountability and problem-solving?
- Which indicators best predict long-term faith leader engagement and couple outcomes?

IPA's pilot in Kenya is testing the Champions model, where senior faith leaders provide mentorship and practical support to peers, offering a potential low-cost mechanism for ongoing quality assurance and program fidelity.

5.6 INTEGRATION INTO THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Institutionalizing Becoming One within theological training systems is key to long-term sustainability. Embedding gender-equitable relationship education into faith leader training ensures impact beyond project cycles.

Learning questions:

- What is the most effective way to integrate Becoming One content - through standalone modules or existing courses?
- How can partnerships with theological institutions strengthen institutional ownership?
- What are best practices for navigating curriculum approval and accreditation processes?

By addressing these learning areas, IPA aims to generate actionable evidence to guide scaling decisions, inform future partnerships, and strengthen Becoming One's global impact.

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6. Current Pilots and Next Steps

Building on lessons from Uganda, IPA and partners are now piloting Becoming One in two additional contexts to test adaptation, delivery models, and operational systems for scale. These pilots are designed to generate evidence on how the program can maintain its impact while expanding to new settings.

6.1 KENYA: ADAPTING FOR CONTEXT AND SCALE

In partnership with World Vision, IPA is piloting Becoming One in Kenya with 70 faith leaders from diverse denominations. The pilot aims to identify the contextual and operational adjustments required to deliver the program effectively in a new country context.

Key focus areas include:

- **Cultural adaptations:** Illustrations and character names in the curriculum have been updated to reflect Kenyan contexts, enhancing relevance and connection.
- **Acceptance and desirability:** Feedback from participants and faith leaders has been used to ensure the curriculum is engaging and appealing to couples.
- **Operational testing:** The multidenominational pilot explores how faith leaders can recruit and manage multiple cohorts of couples each year while maintaining program fidelity.

IPA and World Vision are also testing the Becoming One Champions model, in which senior faith leaders receive advanced training to mentor peers, support troubleshooting, and monitor implementation quality. This approach is being evaluated as a cost-effective way to sustain quality at scale.

6.2 PARTNERSHIP WITH INTERNATIONAL CARE MINISTRIES (ICM)

IPA is collaborating with International Care Ministries (ICM) to test how Becoming One can be integrated or adapted to an existing faith-based development program. ICM's Transform initiative supports families through interventions focused on health, livelihoods, and savings groups - creating a natural entry point for Becoming One.

The pilot engages 20 faith leaders in Uganda who have first participated in the program and subsequently will implement the curriculum within their respective congregations.. IPA provides technical guidance on training, qualitative observations, and session evaluations to capture how the model operates when embedded within an existing organizational structure.

This partnership will help identify what institutional and operational conditions enable replication of Becoming One within other organizations, and what support systems are required to maintain program quality and impact.

6.3 NEXT STEPS

Over the next one to two years, IPA and partners will:

- Continue testing program adaptations in Kenya and Uganda to refine scalable delivery and training models.
- Evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of hybrid and digital components to expand reach while maintaining engagement.
- Strengthen monitoring systems and peer-led support structures for faith leaders.
- Advance institutional integration within national faith leadership structures.
- Mobilize funding for a multi-country rollout, which will allow broader testing of program models, cost structures, and scalability across diverse cultural and operational environments.

Through these pilots and future studies, IPA aims to deepen understanding of how Becoming One can deliver sustained, evidence-based impact at scale - informing both program design and broader strategies for scaling relationship and violence prevention interventions.

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7. Conclusion

The Becoming One Learning Agenda provides a structured roadmap to guide how IPA and partners will continue to learn, adapt, and scale an evidence-based approach to strengthening relationships and preventing intimate partner violence. It builds on strong early results from Uganda and defines the next set of questions required to ensure that the program remains effective, relevant, and sustainable as it expands to new contexts.

Through iterative research, human-centered design, and cross-sectoral collaboration, Becoming One demonstrates how faith-based institutions can be key partners in advancing gender equity and reducing violence within families. The program's model - rooted in community trust and guided by data - offers a scalable framework for transforming social norms and improving well-being at the household level.

As a Best Bet, Becoming One represents more than a proven intervention; it is a platform for ongoing learning. The agenda outlined in this document positions the program to:

- Continue testing and refining its model across countries and delivery systems;
- Build the institutional and operational foundations for sustainable scale; and
- Generate actionable insights to inform the broader field of evidence-based IPV prevention.

By maintaining a strong learning orientation and investing in adaptive partnerships, Becoming One can continue to evolve - contributing to a global effort to prevent violence, promote equality, and strengthen families at scale.