UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
Elevating Practice-Based Learning on Pathways to Prevention:
A Methodology Note[1]

Rationale

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) is the only global grant-making mechanism dedicated to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. Managed by UN Women on behalf of the UN system since its establishment in 1996 by UN General Assembly resolution 50/166, the UN Trust Fund has awarded almost USD183 million to 572 initiatives in 140 countries and territories.

The UN Trust Fund has prioritized engagement with what has been – to date – a fairly neglected area within global violence against women and girls (VAW/G) research, namely practice-based learning,[2] by commissioning a synthesis review of lessons on the prevention of VAW/G. This note summarizes the key steps in the methodology for determining the themes and elevating lessons.

Methodology for harvesting practice-based learning on VAW/G prevention

Step 1:
In the first phase, a qualitative, inductive approach was used to surface the documented experiences of projects that offer nuanced breadth and depth on issues emerging from diverse contexts. Some 89 project grants were selected, all of which are civil society organization (CSO) projects from the UN Trust Fund's funding cycles 14-20, with the bulk of the projects being closed or implemented in the UN Trust Fund's last Strategic Plan period in 2015-2020. Their final progress reports (written by grantees) and final evaluation reports (written by external evaluators commissioned by grantees) were coded in Atlas.ti8 and synthesized to ensure that the practice-based learning from the UN Trust Fund database itself plays a central role in determining the recommended focus of the various themes explored. These were triangulated with a rapid literature review (an overview of the state of evidence on what works to end VAW/G) to find key themes.

Ten key Pathways towards Prevention were identified:

1. **Community mobilization:** What can we learn from projects that centred on community action and locally-owned responses? How did they draw on their long-term presence and existing structures? What role can new women-centred community associations and activities (such as by training women community paralegals) play to put survivor needs at the centre of projects to end VAW/G? What lessons are being learned about how long community mobilization takes?
2. **Engaging faith-based and traditional actors**: What can we learn from projects that have engaged religious or traditional actors or leaders and their institutions? Some of the projects adopted direct strategies; others adapted to engage religious and traditional leaders. What can be learned about how and why to work with religious and traditional leaders in ways that support VAW/G prevention and can also draw on indigenous spiritualities as a positive resource for VAW/G prevention and supporting survivors?

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[1] This report was co-authored by Dr Elisabet Le Roux and Dr Selina Palm. The longer report is available upon request.
[2] For the purposes of this report, we are drawing on Raising Voice's definition of practitioner-based learning, defined as the *"cumulative knowledge and learning acquired by practitioners from designing and implementing diverse programmes in different contexts, including insights gained from observations, conversations, direct experiences, and programme monitoring"*.

3. **Exploring intersecting approaches:** A number of intersecting identity variables combine to place some women at increased risk, such as being HIV-positive, pregnant, LBTQI+, a migrant or displaced, or having a disability. As a result, there is much to learn from projects that intentionally engaged with women at increased risk because of their intersectional identities. How did they navigate the different challenges of different identities, and the different sources of resistance to different identities?

4. **Transforming women from beneficiaries to actors:** Many grantees found that women were most empowered when they were active agents, rather than passive beneficiaries, of project activities. What can be learned from projects that mobilized women to become project implementers, volunteers and/or activists? How did they facilitate this process; how did they support it; and how do they sustain it? Is it easier/harder to do this when women are also survivors?

5. **Training for behaviour change:** Training and sensitization are key project strategies for most projects working to prevent VAW/G. What can we learn from these diverse training and sensitization models? Who has been targeted and why has this been critical? What formats worked or did not work? How can seemingly successful peer-to-peer or training-of-trainers approaches be better supported with the right resources? Are there lessons being learned about how to adapt tools or methods that have worked elsewhere?

6. **Adolescent-focused approaches:** These emerged in both in- and out-of-school settings, often with a strong emphasis on girl-led or whole-of-school approaches. What can be learnt from projects with adolescents, especially those that place the leadership of girls at the centre of their approach? Are empowering methodologies emerging as important protective factors? How is working with boys and girls offering insights on social norms for co-creating new norms?

7. **Resistance and backlash**: Project implementation often faces unforeseen resistance and even backlash. This is frequently due to dominant social norms but can also be a result of local or national perceptions about work on gender or with women, or even because of local or national government dissatisfaction with specific activities or criticism. What can we learn from projects that experienced such resistance or backlash? Women's rights organizations are often targeted, irrespective of specific programming, because of the inherent nature and aims of these organizations. How do they deal with such resistance? What steps can be taken to avoid or mitigate it, without compromising the focus and aims of the organization?

8. **Adaptive programming:** During project implementation, most grantees had to respond to a number of unforeseen challenges and changes. Some organizations were more able to do so effectively, adjusting mid-programme while remaining true to their overarching ethos and goals. We can learn from these organizations not only how to navigate external and internal challenges, but also how to design a project that is inherently agile and therefore more able to adapt to the inevitably changing and challenging circumstances of EVAW/G prevention work.

9. **Working together for survivor-centred, multi-sector response:** Several grantees believe that down-stream engagement with survivors is a critical element of up-stream prevention of violence. By learning from these projects, we can understand better if and how survivor response may feed back into longer term prevention, and how to effectively support this process. How are effective, multi-sector partnerships formed that can support the survivor throughout? What does being survivor-centred look like within each of these sectors? What protocols, policies and support are needed for these partnerships?

10. **Working together for law and policy implementation and reform**: What can we learn from projects that engage on domestic law and policy reform, and how can contributions to changing shared systems be better understood and measured? How can groups left behind become visible? In what ways can institutions of justice be held to account and capacitated to be survivor-centred and hold perpetrators accountable, including in post-conflict settings?

Step 2:
On the above selected themes, we sought feedback from **consultations with 250+ practitioners and research advisory group in three languages** – English, French and Spanish. The aim of the consultations was to validate the 10 pathways of prevention, solicit feedback and incorporate it before commissioning the briefings.

Step 3:
After validating the 10 key themes, we commissioned **10 synthesis reviews (30-40 pages)**. One researcher was partnered with 10 grantee organizations per theme to co-create the learning on each theme. The aim of each review is

to synthesize the existing evidence on what works and put this in conversation with practice-based learning emerging from the 10 UN Trust Fund grantees. Each grantee's project was drawn on through their internal monitoring reports and their external evaluation report. The CSOs were then brought together in a series of focus group discussions. These reviews offer significant lessons on each theme and will offer contextual and embedded best practices, challenges and useful tools that emerge from "learning by doing" to navigate the transformative process of VAW/G prevention. The thematic synthesis reviews will start to be made available on the UN Trust Fund website from July 2021.

While the synthesis reviews are targeted at a more academic audience, each is accompanied by a **shorter summary briefing available in English, French and Spanish**. A detailed methodology, case selection strategy and further information on the grantees, including links to their evaluations, are available in an **appendix** on the same page as the synthesis reviews and summary briefs.

Step 4:
In a series of **webinars and consultations on the UN Trust Fund's new community platform** in the coming year (August 2021 to August 2022), we will ask for feedback on each of the 10 themes from a wider community of practice. These activities will lead up to a **final launch event and report in 2022,** reflecting on the implications of this body of knowledge for the field of VAW/G prevention – for researchers, practitioners and donors.

Further information:

UN Trust Fund Learning Hub: For the full set of synthesis reviews and learning from practice briefings on prevention of VAW/G as well as other knowledge products.

UN Trust Fund Evaluation Library: For access to over 100 final external evaluations of projects supported by the UN Trust Fund, including most of those mentioned in this briefing. The library is searchable by country and theme.

For more information or feedback on this product, please contact the UN Trust Fund at untf-evaw@unwomen.org.