LEARNING FROM PRACTICE:

EXPLORING INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES TO PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Lessons from civil society organisations funded by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women on prevention

About the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

The United Nations 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 United Nations system since its establishment in 1996 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 50/166, the UN Trust Fund has awarded almost $183 million to 572 initiatives in 140 countries and territories. In 2020, the UN Trust Fund managed a grants portfolio of 150 projects aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women and girls in 71 countries and territories across five regions, with grants totalling $72.8 million. Grant recipients are primarily civil society organizations (CSOs). Since 2018 (cycle 20), the UN Trust Fund has been funding only CSO projects. The majority (58 per cent) of these CSOs are women's rights organizations.

About the learning from practice series on prevention

In this series, the UN Trust Fund has prioritised engagement with what has – to date – been a fairly neglected area within research on prevention of violence against women and girls, practice based insights from civil society organizations. In 2020 it commissioned a synthesis of this knowledge emerging from 89 UN Trust Fund civil society organisation grants, implemented or closed during the period covered by its 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. Findings were captured from two types of source documents from grantees: final progress reports (written by grantees) and final evaluation reports (written by external evaluators commissioned by grantees). The first step in the series was a synthesis review and identification of common approaches or thematic areas in prevention across the 89 projects, to determine the focus of knowledge to be extracted (Le Roux and Palm, 2020). Ten key thematic areas or "**Pathways towards Prevention"** (Box 1) were identified through an inductive process including a desk review of reports *and* a series of consultations with grantees/practitioners in English,

French and Spanish. The UN Trust Fund aims to analyse and co-create knowledge under each pathway. Each pathway has been analysed and the corresponding synthesis co-created by a researcher/s and ten grantees per pathway whose work generated significant practice-based insights on the particular theme and who could offer contextual and embedded best practices, challenges and useful tools on the topic that emerged from iterative learning from practice. The intended audience for this synthesis review is threefold: (i) practitioners (ii) donors and grant makers and (iii) researchers, all working in the area of EVAWG. The learning from practice series is intended to elevate practice-based insights from CSOs as highly valuable and important to planning, designing and funding interventions and research in EVAWG. Each longer synthesis review will be accompanied by a shorter, summary brief available on the UN Trust Fund website.

BOX 1: PATHWAYS TOWARDS PREVENTION IDENTIFIED

1. Community Mobilization
2. Engaging faith based and traditional actors
3. **Exploring intersectional approaches**
4. Mobilizing Women
5. Training for behaviour change
6. Adolescent-focused approaches
7. Resistance and backlash
8. Adaptive programming
9. Working together for a survivor-centered, multisectoral response
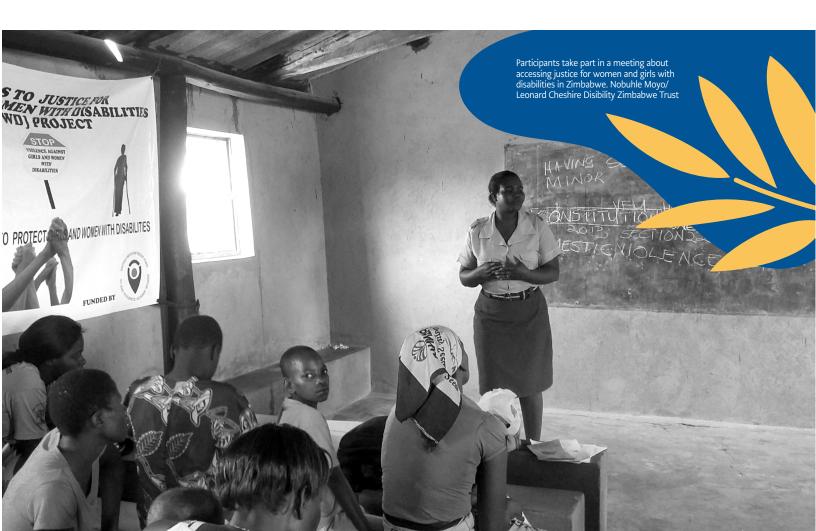10. Working together for law and policy implementation and reform

Acknowledgements

Participants take part in a meeting about accessing justice for women and girls with disabilities in Zimbabwe. Nobuhle Moyo/ Leonard Cheshire Disibility Zimbabwe Trust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Intersectional approaches to the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are receiving more attention around the world in the light of increased awareness in the past few decades of the fact that many women's and girls' lives are shaped by multiple vulnerabilities that can interact to exacerbate each other. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the fact that existing vulnerabilities can intersect with gender in complex ways, putting some women and girls more at risk of VAWG than others. This requires intersectional approaches that critically examine how vulnerabilities overlap in women's and girls' lives, compounding their risk of experiencing VAWG and creating barriers to accessing VAWG prevention services. The Sustainable Development Goals' focus on "leaving no one behind" emphasizes inclusive approaches to VAWG that also centre intersectionality. Intersectional approaches also pay close attention to power relations and systems that create and maintain complex patterns of intersecting vulnerabilities to violence in the lives of women and girls. In engaging with these vulnerabilities, these approaches avoid viewing women or girls as innately vulnerable or in need of protection.

This synthesis review addresses an identified gap in the literature around how to apply intersectionality in practice in relation to VAWG prevention programming in different specific contexts. The synthesis review centres the voices of key practitioners in the field and their practice-based knowledge, focusing on 10 diverse projects funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. The projects used different intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention in different countries, engaging with a range of actors, using multiple approaches and deploying different entry points. They highlight the diversity of work worldwide, emphasizing that a "one size fits all" intersectional approach to VAWG prevention does not exist.

Key emerging themes from practice

Five key themes emerged from practitioner learning and were used to synthesize the data and structure this synthesis review:

- **Applying intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention**. Intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention primarily started in practice by identifying specific groups of women and girls with multiple vulnerabilities to understand how these intersected in dynamic ways with compounded consequences. As a result, many different entry points were used in VAWG prevention programming, with human rights often providing a useful lens for projects across their different approaches.
- **Making intersecting vulnerabilities visible for VAWG prevention**. Women and girls with intersecting vulnerabilities were frequently invisibilized, both as a group and in terms of some of their specific challenges in their contexts. This impacted practitioners' ability to identify the women most in need and to respond appropriately to hidden risks and needs. Five domains of invisibility were identified: data collection, service provision, self-stigmatization, legal and policy systems, and perpetration.
- **Participation in intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention**. Practitioners emphasize the value of participation of women who are vulnerable to violence because of intersecting aspects of their identities or circumstances in the design and implementation of VAWG prevention programming, for example in curriculum development, peer engagement, and training and advocacy activities. This increases the impact of programming, as well as practitioners' ability to identify and engage with such women.
- **Partnering for intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention.** Partnerships between organizations that focus on and represent different groups with compounded intersecting vulnerabilities to violence enable intersectional approaches across a

range of vulnerable groups. Practitioners identified both advantages of and challenges resulting from collaborations.

- **COVID-19, intersectional approaches and VAWG prevention.** The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges for VAWG prevention. The risk of VAWG increased and many programmes were suspended. Practitioners identified the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed as a result exacerbated many women's pre-existing vulnerabilities to violence. Intersectional approaches help to respond in situations where some women would otherwise be left behind because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions highlight the important roles that different types of civil society organizations can play in engaging with women who are made vulnerable to violence because of intersecting aspects of their identities or circumstances. These organizations navigate the complexities of intersecting vulnerabilities in VAWG prevention in different ways. When intersectional approaches are used to identify the focus of programming, complex questions emerge around practical decisions involving tension between having a targeted focus and being inclusive. Where organizations adopt intersectional approaches to programme design and implementation, they may realize that they need to reconsider the focus of their programming. This highlights how intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention challenge practitioners to constantly critically reflect on why and how they choose to implement their programmes. Organizations may take their intersectional approaches further, by focusing on the systems and power relations that drive inequalities and vulnerabilities. By doing so, they highlight the centrality of power and the importance of VAWG prevention interventions that critically engage with power relations. This key feature of intersectional approaches also challenges the VAWG prevention field itself, by calling for a more comprehensive, multidimensional focus on power.

A final set of recommendations at the end of this synthesis review suggests that practitioners should (1) co-produce programming with women living with overlapping vulnerabilities, (2) start with an analysis of intersecting vulnerabilities in their specific context, (3) address how the invisibility of certain groups of women and girls is created and reinforced as a starting point for prevention programming, (4) pay attention to multidimensional power relations, engaging with individuals, groups and systems that together make women and girls vulnerable to violence and (5) work collaboratively with partners that engage with different groups of women and build an intersectional approach in ways that maximize resources and learning by building synergy and shared agendas. **These recommendations also suggest that donors and policymakers should** (1) seek out small local specialist organizations that often have a stronger grasp of the complex intersections in their specific context, (2) fund collaborative work between local CSOs that are already engaging with diverse groups which might help reduce fragmentation of policies or funding for separate vulnerabilities, (3) allow time and funding for adaptive programming because carrying out analysis and design in intersectional ways requires additional programmatic steps that add time and costs, (4) equip organizations to do intersectional analysis from below and (5) pay attention to intersectional power relations in their own systems - power relations may remain latent in their processes, for example if they use pre-determined categories of vulnerabilities into which all practitioners must fit their proposals or reports. Intersectional approaches must go beyond including left-out groups in the existing development system to raise fundamental questions about that system and its actors and biases. **Finally, some recommendations for VAWG researchers include** (1) make perpetration and the power relations that often create and maintain intersecting vulnerabilities to violence visible, (2) be intentional, collaborative and accountable in exploring interconnections recognizing their own linguistic power with regard to what is made visible and what is prioritized and (3) engage with complexity and compounded realities of women's lives that heighten vulnerability to violence.

1. CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CIMUNIDIS	Circulo Emancipador de Mujeres y Niñas con Discapacidad de Chile
Corporación Humanas	Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género: Corporación Humanas
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSO	civil society organization
FGD	focus group discussion
FSIS	Fundació Privada Sida i Societat
GWWD	girls and women with disabilities
HelpAge	HelpAge International Moldova
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
JASL	Jamaica AIDS Support for Life
LBT	Lesbian, bisexual or transgender
LCDZ	Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe
MDRI-S	Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia
NGO	non-governmental organization
PBK	practice-based knowledge
RSAT	Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand
UN Trust Fund	United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
VAWG	violence against women and girls
WCC	War Child Canada

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Why do intersectional approaches matter for prevention of violence against women and girls?

Women and girls are at high risk of experiencing violence around the world today. This risk is impacted both by their gender and by a variety of other factors: for example, by being HIV-positive; being pregnant; being lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LBT); being a girl or an older woman; having a disability; being a migrant, trafficking survivor or self-identified sex worker, displaced or out of school; or belonging to a racial, ethnic or religious minority group (Collins, 2015; Armstrong et al., 2018; Kumar, 2018; UN Women, 2019). Women and girls who are part of more than one of these groups are often at greater, compounded risk of experiencing violence (Kumar, 2018). Underlying circumstances such as extreme poverty or armed conflict also create additional gendered vulnerabilities (Walby et al., 2012a; Swaine et al., 2019). These diverse realities are interconnected, dynamic, compounding and often linked to changing circumstances in the lives of women and girls. They are not tied to fixed individual attributes that can be merely added together (Collins, 2015; Chaplin et al., 2019; UN Women, 2019). It is a complex task to identify appropriate responses for the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) that take seriously the realities of many women's lives. Intersectional approaches grapple with complexity in analysing VAWG and in working to prevent it (UN Women, 2019).

FIGURE 1:
A Visual Representation of Intersectionality

Adapted from UN Women (2019)

This synthesis review draws together lessons learned by a range of practitioners who have applied intersectional approaches to preventing VAWG in projects funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) in different parts of the world. It showcases how VAWG prevention in many contexts benefits from intersectional approaches to the diverse, compounding ways in which women and girls often become more vulnerable to violence because of aspects of their identity or circumstances. It contributes to a more practical understanding of how and why an intersectional approach to vulnerabilities is being used for VAWG prevention (Bose, 2012; Sosa, 2017; UN Women, 2019). Although the language of intersectionality is emerging in much VAWG-related literature, and many VAWG prevention organizations are using intersectional approaches to address compounding vulnerabilities in their contexts, theory and practice are not often being brought into conversation (Walby et al., 2012a; Armstrong et al., 2018; Kumar, 2018; UN Women, 2019; Le Roux and Palm, 2020; Mastonshoeva, 2020; UN Women, 2020a; Valerio and Butt, 2020). Furthermore, work by practitioners on intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention is not always being communicated to enable practitioner insights to contribute to the global knowledge base (Faris and Jayaserkara, 2019). This synthesis review contributes to addressing these various gaps in existing VAWG prevention evidence on intersectional approaches.

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality is a way of understanding that many different social categories interrelate in the lives of women and girls. Diverse identity categories (e.g. race, gender and class) or wider circumstances (e.g. occupation, migration status and HIV status), can intersect in compounding ways to produce new forms of vulnerability to VAWG (Walby et al., 2012a; UN Women, 2020a). These categories and circumstances shape each other in complex, non-linear and often unpredictable ways. Interlocking systems of oppression can emerge in which women and girls can feel trapped. These diverse identities may carry different weight in terms of increased risk according to the specific context; for example, a lesbian woman in Saudi Arabia may be at greater risk of violence than one in Sweden (Stephens et al., 2018).

The term "intersectionality" was introduced by black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to emphasize the interconnections between gender and race in relation to VAWG (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 2016). This feminist-informed approach draws attention to the interlocking systems of oppression in which many women and girls are made vulnerable (Collins, 2015; Armstrong et al., 2018; Kumar, 2018). A focus on sexism in particular should not draw attention away from other forms of domination (e.g. racism, class privilege and heteronormativity) but make their interconnections in the lives of women and girls more visible (Collins, 2015; Armstrong et al., 2018). The feminist-informed approach also challenges tendencies to see women as innately vulnerable and in need of protection. It contests fixed categories of gender binaries that may leave some women behind (Collins, 2015; Armstrong et al., 2018). Intersectional approaches pay attention to overlapping power relations not only between categories of oppression (e.g. race and gender) but also within categories (e.g. women) (Walby et al., 2012b). Fixed, stereotyped categories are avoided to insist that all categories are provisional and fluid (McCall, 2005; Walby et al., 2012b; Chaplin et al., 2019). This enables intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention that show "the way that people's social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination" (UN Women, 2020a).

1.2. Centring practitioner insights on intersectional approaches

At the heart of this synthesis review are practitioner insights from 10 civil society organization (CSO) projects working on VAWG prevention, aimed at increasing understanding of how intersectionality is being implemented in practice (Bose, 2012; Chaplin et al., 2019; Heard, 2020). All 10 projects' entry point into intersectional approaches was identifying a specific group (or groups) of women and/or girls who were made particularly vulnerable to violence because of their unique identities and circumstances. The group or groups that were identified and the intervention that was formulated were significantly different depending on the context. For example, the starting point of Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand (RSAT) was recognizing that women with diverse sexual and gender identities are at greater risk of

experiencing violence, especially because of the stigma they face in this setting, and the organization focused its project entirely on LBT women. Fundación Mundubat in Colombia focused on how ethnicity, rurality and gender can compound vulnerabilities to violence for indigenous and Afro-Colombian women, who are historically excluded and underserved groups in this context. Fundació Privada Sida i Societat (FSIS) in Guatemala recognized how migrant status and sex work intersect to make certain women particularly vulnerable to violence and focused its programming on migrant self-identified sex workers. HelpAge International Moldova (HelpAge) recognized the specific risks of violence faced by elderly women and focused its programming on preventing violence against them. Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe (LCDZ) and Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia (MDRI-S) both addressed the increased vulnerability to violence of girls and women with disabilities (GWWD), but the two organizations responded to their situations by designing very different interventions: LCDZ focused on prevention and access to justice for GWWD who live in rural communities, while MDRI-S focused on preventing violence against women with mental disabilities who live in residential institutions.

Some organizations identified multiple groups of women who were vulnerable to violence because of their intersecting identities by designing partnership-based VAWG prevention projects. For example, Equality's project in China focused on LBT women, women with HIV and young women, while Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género: Corporación Humanas (Corporación Humanas) in Chile focused on migrant women, women with HIV, lesbian and bisexual women, transgender self-identified sex workers and women with disabilities. Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) addressed violence against women in the broader context of HIV and AIDS, and at the same time focused its programming on responding to particular vulnerabilities around HIV and VAWG of LBT women, GWWD and self-identified sex workers. War Child Canada (WCC) in Jordan responded to circumstances making Syrian refugee women and girls particularly vulnerable to violence but highlighted commonalities of age and gender by including women and girls (in and out of school) from Jordanian host communities.

All 10 projects included in this synthesis review entered into intersectional approaches by first emphasizing ways in which women and girls experience multiple vulnerabilities in various specific contexts. They offer insights from practice into how these vulnerabilities often intersect to increase exposure to VAWG and barriers faced in accessing support, and they highlight the value of VAWG prevention strategies taking intersectional approaches. Many projects identified the groups of women and girls that they focused on as "vulnerable" and some projects referred to them as "marginalized", while a few called the groups "stigmatized". While the term "vulnerabilities" is contested to some extent in intersectional approaches as a result of, for example, the risk of presenting women as innately vulnerable, this synthesis review requires a focus on vulnerabilities, as it centres practitioner insights and all 10 of the projects included in this synthesis review identified one or more vulnerable groups as the starting point for their intersectional approaches. This may be partly because of their roles as VAWG prevention service providers that need to apply for funding by sharing a concrete plan detailing who they will work with and why. However, this needs to be taken seriously as a starting point, although it may sit in tension with a tendency in academia to use intersectionality theory as a starting point.

While all 10 of the organizations used intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention in their contexts, they differed in many ways. The selection criteria for the projects focused on here prioritized diversity in six categories: geographical location of project implementation, types of identities engaged with, number of groups engaged with, type of VAWG focused on, and size and duration of UN Trust Fund grant. The 10 projects were also selected because their annual project and final evaluation reports (submitted to the UN Trust Fund over the 2015–2020 strategic plan period) contained specific insights from their practical experiences of using intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention. Placing this diverse collection of 10 projects into conversation with each other allows rich reflections on lessons learned from intersectionality in practice in VAWG prevention. More detail on the goals, approaches and results of these 10 projects can be found in appendix A on the UN Trust Fund website.

1.3. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework set out below was designed as a tool to increase understanding of how VAWG prevention projects are evolving in their various journeys with intersectionality. It was designed in the aftermath of the inductive research process based on the practical learning that emerged. Figure 2 depicts a funnel, showcasing that the entry point into intersectional approaches in practice for most of the projects selected for this synthesis review was at stage 1. Yet organizations journeying through the "funnel" of taking an intersectional approach may find themselves at different stages throughout the project cycle, as the process is not necessarily linear.

Identifying intersecting vulnerabilities is the starting point for the ten projects, where they identify a specific group or specific groups of women and girls that are seen as particularly vulnerable to violence due to overlapping aspects of their identities or circumstances (e.g. lesbian, bisexual or transgender women; migrant women; girls and women with disabilities).

Intersectional design and implementation includes intersectional analysis of the project context, which feeds into initial programme design. Intersectional design moves beyond simply targeting certain groups of women, by also listening to their needs and priorities and including them in programme design and implementation.

Intersectional practice focuses attention on the structures, systems and power relations that create and reinforce the inequalities that maintain women's and girls' compounded vulnerabilities to violence (e.g. transforming social norms, working with perpetrators, addressing discriminatory structures).

Identifying intersecting vulnerabilities. The starting point for projects in practice is their awareness that not all women and girls are at risk of violence in the same ways. Certain diverse identities intersect to make certain groups of women and/or girls more vulnerable to violence in their specific context. In stage 1, organizations identify a specific group or specific groups of women and girls who are vulnerable to compounded risks of violence because of overlapping aspects of their identities or circumstances. This often starts with the wider identification of multiple identities and factors that can make women and girls vulnerable to violence, which are then usually narrowed down to a subset to design a targeted programme. For example, the UN Trust Fund requests applicants for grants to select four main beneficiary or target groups, with an assumption that this allows for a more focused, effective project. In some cases, this is where the intersectional approach ends.

Intersectional design and implementation. A second stage goes deeper and builds on stage 1. Here, projects include an intersectional analysis of their context, which impacts programme design. This stage involves looking at other ways in which project interventions can address the risk of VAWG as a result of intersecting identities, rather than targeting only specific groups of women with services or prevention programming. This may involve explicit partnering with other specialist grass-roots organizations; it often also includes making these women and girls more visible by involving them in programme design and implementation and asking them to provide feedback. This can begin to change the power dynamics in the organization. Stage 2 is represented by the middle of the funnel in figure 2, where the project's intersectional understanding of the context and of intervention design and implementation ensures the inclusion and participation of those on whom the intervention focuses.

Intersectional practice. In the third stage, projects place the experiences of those who are marginalized or made vulnerable in overlapping ways by current systems and power relations at the centre of driving change. A strong focus here is on transforming underlying sociostructural systems (which may be seen as "fixed" in earlier stages) to address root causes that currently make some women and girls more vulnerable to violence. This

is long-term, multi-stakeholder work and cannot be done effectively in one project cycle, or even by one organization. It also avoids monocausal approaches (e.g. looking at patriarchy or racism) to explore how causes are interconnected and need to be comprehensively addressed. This stage forms the deepest part of the funnel in figure 2, as it goes beyond identification and inclusion to tackle root causes.

FIGURE 3:
The ten UN Trust Fund projects included in this synthesis review

FUNDACIÓ PRIVADA SIDA I SOCIETAT, **GUATEMALA**
- Women's rights organization
- violence against migrant self-identified sex workers
- communities including male clients
- Escuintla, Puerto San José, and Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa in Escuintla province.

MENTAL DISABILITY RIGHTS INITIATIVE, **SERBIA**
- Women's rights organization
- Violence against women living with mental disabilities
- Health services
- Serbia

HELPAGE INTERNATIONAL, **MOLDOVA**
- International organization
- Violence against older women
- Increase access to justice and services
- 8 communities in Moldova

EQUALITY, **CHINA**
- Human rights organization
- GBV, violence against LBT, women living with HIV/AIDS
- Network of partners and advocacy
- Changsha, Kunming, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Xi'an, Shenzhen, and Beijing

JAMAICA AIDS SUPPORT FOR LIFE, **JAMAICA**
- Civil society organization
- Violence against LBT women, women and girls with disabilities, self-identified sex workers and women living with HIV and/or AIDS
- Integrated VAWG prevention and SRHR services
- National project

FUNDACIÓN MUNDUBAT, **COLOMBIA**
- Women's rights organization
- Violence against Afro-colombian and indigenous women
- Advocacy and prevention
- Buenaventura (rural area)

WAR CHILD CANADA, **JORDAN**
- International organization
- Violence in refugee camps
- Awareness raising
- Sahab and Nuzha communities in Amman

RAINBOW SKY ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND, **THAILAND**
- Women's rights organization
- Violence against LBT women
- Advocacy and awareness raising
- Bangkok, Ubon Ratchathani, Chiang Mai and Songkhla regions

CENTRO REGIONAL DE DERECHOS HUMANOS Y JUSTICIA DE GÉNERO: CORPORACIÓN HUMANAS, **CHILE**
- Civil society organization
- Violence against LBT women, migrants, women living with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS
- Partnerships with local organisations
- Southern cone

LEONARD CHESHIRE DISABILITY , **ZIMBABWE**
- Non-profit organisation - Provides support to organizations across several countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, and Haiti, to adapt the SASA! model

1.4. Inductive methodology

This synthesis review identifies, analyses and synthesizes historical practice-based knowledge (PBK) around using intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention. Using selected monitoring and evaluation reports from 10 projects, an inductive approach was taken to explore why and how they engaged with women and girls using intersectional approaches. An overarching question ("What lessons can be learned about how and why to do VAWG prevention work with women and girls marginalized because of their intersecting vulnerabilities, including those exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic") guided the whole process. The synthesis review does not answer pre-decided research questions in a deductive way; rather, it allows diverse practitioner reflections and priorities to be centred.

Although further guiding questions were developed as the process evolved and for focus group discussions (FGDs), the themes explored and insights emerging in this synthesis review were strongly determined by PBK in project reports. This means that information is lacking where project documentation did not discuss certain issues or left gaps in their reflections. The main process (document review) was complemented by a brief review of other literature and three FGDs with representatives of the 10 projects. The first two FGDs collected data, with new insights emerging from practitioners. The third validated the preliminary lessons learned that had been synthesized by the researchers. The FGD guides are available in appendix C. For more on the methodological approach, see appendix B on the UN Trust Fund website.

2. KEY THEMATIC LESSONS EMERGING FROM PRACTICE

This section showcases the experiences of practitioners who engaged with intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention in 10 diverse contexts around the world. Five themes emerged from these contexts and are discussed in the following subsections, with a short literature review accompanying each section. In the discussions, references are made to other **pathways towards prevention**, identified during a synthesis of PBK emerging from over 100 UN Trust Fund CSO grants, during the period covered by its 2015–2020 strategic plan (Le Roux and Palm, 2020).

Participants in a project from Rainbow Sky Association in Thailand working to prevent and end violence against lesbian, bisexual and trans women.
Photo: Rainbow Sky Association Thailand

2.1. Applying intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature shows that intersectionality is being applied in a number of ways for VAWG prevention (Bose, 2012; Atewologun, 2018; Heard, 2020): first, as a decolonizing epistemology to unpack and reflect on what is being named as violence; second, as an analytical tool to encourage reflexive, participatory approaches in VAWG and wider women's health research and programming (Sosa, 2017; Hankivsky and Kapilashrami, 2020; Heard, 2020); and, third, as a social justice tool for practical action (Collins, 2017; Kumar, 2018). Feminist approaches to VAWG prevention point to the need for both intersectional analysis and intersectional approaches to programming (Kumar, 2018; UN Women, 2019). The importance of applying intersectionality in practice has received increased attention in recent years (Sosa, 2017; Chaplin et al., 2019; Heard, 2020). Feminist scholars apply intersectionality to VAWG prevention, making it a political task that challenges systems of power that shape vulnerability. This means tackling societal-level drivers of oppression and privilege, which requires the development of a critical consciousness (Kumar, 2018; Chaplin et al, 2019; UN Women, 2019; Heard, 2020; Lokot and Avakyan, 2020). By emphasizing mutually shaping factors at the intersections of interlocking systems of oppression, intersectional VAWG prevention acknowledges the compounding effects of this web of intersecting factors in women's lives (Walby et al., 2012b). The intersectional approach takes patriarchy seriously but refuses to see it as the only system of power oppressing women (Sosa, 2017).

An intersectional approach can support a human rights lens on VAWG prevention programming (Sosa, 2017) by drawing attention to the power relations and structural intersections between different dimensions of vulnerability, for example in the case of women with disabilities (Mastonshoeva, 2020), or women of diverse sexual and gender identities (Fraser and Wood, 2018). It draws attention to the sociostructural, political and legal aspects of vulnerability through which individual vulnerability is often both constructed and maintained, including through social norms (Sosa, 2017). Feminism has often been wary of a human rights lens and, until recently, VAWG was absent from male-dominated human rights discourse (Kabeer, 2014). However, scholars are starting to piece together frameworks linking feminist approaches, human rights and intersectionality (Collins et al., 2010; Sosa, 2017).

Much of the literature either focuses on intersectionality in theory or offers specific examples of practice in the context of only one country (UN Women, 2019; Mastonshoeva, 2020; Valerio and Butt 2020). Little research currently exists, particularly in the academic literature, that explores its practical application to VAWG prevention programming across a range of different contexts and puts them in conversation with each other. This section contributes to the call to pay closer attention to the practical implications of using intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention (Sosa, 2017; Atrey, 2019; Heard, 2020).

All 10 projects included in this synthesis review emphasize ways in which women and girls are vulnerable to violence in various specific contexts. Most of the projects initially targeted specific groups in their contexts that were identified by the researchers as having intersecting vulnerabilities, but, in environments of poverty, rurality or conflict, additional underlying vulnerabilities often emerged over time as compounding these intersections further.

Across the intersectional approaches developed by the 10 projects is a recognition that these vulnerabilities are not merely additive and fixed (e.g. "I am vulnerable both because I am a woman and because I have a disability"). Instead, multiple vulnerabilities often combine in unique, context-specific ways to form complex cycles of compounding, dynamic risks of violence. For example, in Jordan, WCC noted that Syrian girls made vulnerable by fleeing conflict encountered new challenges as migrants, and their age also meant they faced an increased gendered risk of child marriage, tied to patriarchal beliefs about purity. These challenges were compounded by migrant families' need for economic stability and political factors that may exclude girls from attending school. All 10 VAWG prevention projects tried to address the ways in which they saw vulnerabilities intersect in the lives of women to heighten their risk of experiencing violence and create specific barriers to accessing VAWG prevention services, as noted by FSIS in Guatemala:

The project is aimed at women sex workers in Escuintla, Guatemala. They are a group characterized by poverty and lack of work and education opportunities; most of them are illiterate, in a situation of poverty and extreme poverty, associated with alcoholism and drug addiction with high social stigma, single mothers, migrants, the only providers in the family. Generally [they are] of reproductive age, with a higher prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, than the general population and with high rates of violence of all types, especially sexual. They were characterized by little access to psychosocial services, health [services] and justice. Because of all these intersectionalities, it was decided to work with them to address substantive issues that improve their quality of life (written reflection (translated), FGD invitee, 1 February 2021).

While all 10 projects focused on women with multiple intersecting vulnerabilities, they varied significantly in the extent to which they adopted an intersectional approach to project design. Only a few projects directly tackled underlying oppressive power structures of, for example, patriarchy, heteronormativity or ableism. For some projects working intersectionally only emerged implicitly during implementation and for others it was a core starting principle or tied to transforming power structures. For example, Fundación Mundubat in Colombia took an explicitly intersectional approach to its work empowering Afro-Colombian and indigenous women in rural, post-conflict settings of poverty around VAWG prevention and care. It focused from the start on how their gender intersected with three other facets in particular – their ethnic identity, their circumstances of poverty and their life in a rural setting. However, Fundación Mundubat did not stop after identifying these intersecting vulnerabilities; it went on to adopt an intersectional project analysis and design. The aim of the project was to transform power relations in the community that interwove patriarchal, racist and class systems. Recognition of these specific intersections from the start enabled Fundación Mundubat to critically explore how they translated into exclusion, discrimination and violence. This intersectional approach was also incorporated into its training materials, which analysed these oppressions through a feminist lens (focused on patriarchy, racism and classism). The organization's commitment to an intersectional approach involved remaining aware of additional intersecting vulnerabilities that emerged along the way. This enabled practical strategies to be developed to overcome obstacles.

Fundación Mundubat's approach also intentionally identified and engaged with men as well as with wider patriarchal systems and structures that surrounded these women to highlight harmful power relations and offer alternatives. This suggests that work on intersecting vulnerabilities should not be reduced to working with women and girls alone; it can also make visible and act to change the surrounding power relations that interact to create patterns of discrimination and violence. This supports the existing literature on intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention, which highlights the importance of paying close attention to power relations and the structural contexts that shape vulnerability, as well as the laws and policies that constrain individual realities.

Fundación Mundubat pays attention to both individual women's agency and the oppressive structures that often surround them. This goes beyond just "working with women" to working with them in ways that are relevant to how these systems create and reinforce vulnerabilities.

Fundación Mundubat engaged with resources that women brought from their indigenous traditions, such as healing rituals, in ways that subverted prevailing societal assumptions that their indigenous ethnic identities inevitably made them vulnerable. This helped to transform these women's internalized stigma, by recovering their pride in their ethnic identity and indigenous practices, which became VAWG prevention assets on which they drew for resilience and healing.

While vulnerability is often attributed to a specific group in practice, this can unwittingly suggest that some groups, such as migrants, women, girls, lesbians, self-identified sex workers or people with disabilities, are intrinsically more vulnerable. This risks drawing attention only to individuals within these groups and away from the wider legal and political systems in which vulnerability is often socially constructed to ask questions about why these women and girls are being discriminated against, excluded, ignored, abused or made vulnerable. All the projects selected for this synthesis review sought to work with wider systems as well as directly with vulnerable groups, reinforcing literature on this area**.**

For example, LCDZ focused on improving access to justice for GWWD in Zimbabwe who had VAWG cases pending. The practitioners were responding to the reality that GWWD were often excluded from existing legal systems as a result of specific disability-related barriers such as communication (e.g. for those with speech or hearing impairments), transport (e.g. for those with physical impairments) and believability (e.g. those with mental disabilities) as well as disability-related discrimination. This meant their VAWG cases were not reported, did not make it to court or experienced huge delays because of the system's inability to accommodate their needs, as well as discriminatory attitudes towards them. LCDZ worked at multiple levels (individual, community and institutional) to develop a survivor-centred approach that did not leave GWWD behind or enable violence against them to continue with impunity. By taking a partnership approach to human rights, LCDZ also mobilized government

systems, local disability organizations and women's organizations to work on these intersections together, to find synergies and to share their expertise. This helped to ensure that GWWD were engaged with by schools, police stations and law courts in ways that recognized that their vulnerabilities to violence intersected in complex ways shaped by marginalization and discrimination but also supported their agency and voices, as the literature emphasizes.

Different entry points were taken by each project. An intersectional approach should not be confused with one project trying to "do everything". All 10 projects used a targeted entry point to particular intersecting vulnerabilities identified as relevant in their community. Their decision on what to focus on was often shaped partly by their own expertise and the availability of funding. Their focus also reflected the grass-roots realities of organizations where specific entry points uncover how specific vulnerabilities overlap in concrete intersecting ways. Some projects focused on one primary intersection as their entry point. For example, HelpAge in Moldova focused on how elderly people were often left out of existing VAWG prevention approaches, while MDRI-S in Serbia focused on women with mental disabilities in institutions, violence in institutions and the structural violence often associated with institutionalization. Other organizations intentionally began by identifying a range of different vulnerabilities that intersected with gender to build collaborative consortium-level responses. For example, Equality in China brought together different specialist organizations working in the areas of HIV, sexual and gender identity, and youth, and Corporación Humanas in Chile engaged with the issues of disabilities, HIV status, migrancy, sex work, and sexual and gender identity (see appendix A for a table providing information on all 10 projects). This shows that there is no one correct entry point for an intersectional approach to VAWG prevention; rather, it is about how organizations respond to how they see specific vulnerabilities intersecting and emerging in their contexts. For example, FSIS in Guatemala planned to focus on HIV and sexual health in self-identified sex workers, but its intersectional approach to iterative project design, which centred what self-identified sex workers saw as their priorities, led to a focus on their migration status (see section 2.3 for more).

The experiences of LCDZ in Zimbabwe serve as another good example of how specific entry points into intersecting vulnerabilities in VAWG prevention work can be effective if the programmes are allowed to develop and evolve. As a disability organization, disability was LCDZ's initial entry point into an analysis of the gendered threats facing GWWD and how this intersected in compounding ways around VAWG. While people with disabilities were already more vulnerable to discrimination and violence because of their disabilities, women and girls experienced heightened risks because of their gender in ways that were also shaped by their type of disability. For example, women with mental disabilities were identified by LCDZ in FGDs as particularly vulnerable to sexual violence by men, yet this was often silenced at community level and was only made indirectly visible through these women's multiple pregnancies. At the same time, many organizations did not have a common approach to the issue of sexual consent by women with disabilities, which further complicated this reality. GWWD were often excluded from general VAWG prevention messages and needed targeted approaches and tailored materials that took their specific needs into account (this issue is explored in section 2.3). The type and severity of their disability also played a role, highlighting that disabilities themselves must not be viewed homogeneously and reinforcing findings reported in intersectionality literature in this respect. Compounded cycles of vulnerability across these intersections emerged with, for example, community-level protective methods to keep girls with disabilities "safe" from violence by removing them from school, which actually made them more vulnerable in the long term. During the project, it emerged that many were extremely poor and unable to leave rural areas, further compounding their lack of opportunities and access to tailored government services. A second phase was designed to target these emerging intersections.

Use of a human rights lens of analysis was a common theme among several UN Trust Fund-funded projects working intersectionally. This can be a way to hold intersecting vulnerabilities together with a practical rights-based programmatic focus that requires paying attention (and not lip service) to groups that experience compounded vulnerabilities, whose rights are still violated and that have been historically excluded from international development interventions and/or VAWG

prevention programming. This connection between human rights, development and VAWG prevention was articulated by practitioners when asked why intersecting vulnerabilities mattered:

From our end, [on] why intersectional vulnerabilities are important … we're saying when we talk about issues to do with the 2030 Agenda [for Sustainable Development], the "leave no one behind mantra", let it not be fake. Let us see it in implementation … we are grounded in the human rights approach in terms of our programming. When we say, "Leave no one behind," it means everyone has to be part of the development process (FGD, 1 February 2021).

Practitioners pointed out that gender, VAWG prevention and even violence were not always the central concern of the 10 organizations selected for this synthesis review. While these are not mutually exclusive concepts, for some their primary organizational focus might be on working with people with disabilities or tackling discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. Because of this, and in line with the emerging literature, human rights often provided an integrating language that was used to connect different types of violence in ways that could resonate with different groups. For example, in Moldova, HelpAge focused on a human rights, gender-transformative approach to the prevention of violence against older women; in Jordan, a gender-responsive human rights approach to conflict was centred by WCC; in Thailand, the primary focus of RSAT was on the human rights of lesbian, bisexual and trans-gender women; and in Serbia the human rights of women with mental and intellectual disabilities formed a key component of MDRI-S's advocacy. This human rights approach offers the possibility of working both at a systems level, with perpetrators and service providers, to educate them on the rights of vulnerable groups, and at an individual level, by working with women who experience intersecting vulnerabilities to empower them to know their rights and to develop their own agency. This approach was used by JASL in Jamaica with women with HIV and by FSIS in Guatemala with migrant self-identified sex workers, where helping these women to recognize their rights was identified as a central

way to delegitimize the violence they often believed they deserved and build their self-esteem as rights holders who deserved equal recognition. This approach was highly successful in Guatemala, leading to practical changes in how the police formally approached the reporting of violence cases by self-identified sex workers and follow-up. Many projects used a human rights approach to their project design and in their direct engagement with women with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence, to help to decentre the normalization of the violence that they often experience. This approach offers a common platform for collaboration with other organizations, which in turn can mobilize increased accountability and systems change. However, using human rights approaches also led to internal tensions in some projects, for example in Thailand, where an initial project focus on high-level policy and legal human rights advocacy by RSAT failed to speak to the needs prioritized by actual lesbian and transgender women in training sessions (they wanted help to deal with family-level stigma and discrimination). Lessons learned by practitioners suggest that human rights approaches must connect with the lived concerns of individual groups (as part of a feminist human rights praxis) and not be imposed from outside.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- The projects draw attention to how applying intersectionality in practice in VAWG prevention requires an analysis of how multiple vulnerabilities are compounded at their specific intersections. This analysis is then used to shape project design, delivery and methods.

- Several projects used diverse specific entry points into VAWG prevention and did not try to "do everything". Focusing on a primary intersection between gender and one other aspect was often seen to be effective, as long as practitioners also remained alert to new intersections that emerged and resisted homogenizing those in the groups they focused on.

- Different discourses were used by the projects to create a shared understanding. Some found a human rights discourse to be particularly useful for centralizing the priority needs and voices of vulnerable groups and showing how their concerns are interconnected. The projects show that intersectional approaches require practitioners both to engage with vulnerable groups directly and to challenge wider power systems that cause and perpetuate their vulnerability.

Participants in a workshop from MDRI in Serbia on ending violence against women with disabilities. Photo: MDRI-S

2.2. Making intersecting vulnerabilities visible for VAWG prevention

LITERATURE REVIEW.

A body of literature is emerging that shows the harm done by the invisibilization and silencing of marginalized groups and voices (Collins, 2015; Herzog, 2018; McCleary-Sills et al., 2018; Stephens et al., 2018). Invisibilization can shape discourses, making them silenced or unseen. This can make those in a group invisible or misrepresent them by invisibilizing a relevant aspect of their identity (Herzog, 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2018). The literature highlights the need for strengthened intersectional approaches that analyse silence and invisibilization if inclusion of marginalized social groups is to be realized in practice (Herzog, 2018):

Intersectional approaches help us address the blanket exclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups. Certain groups may be "invisible" as dimensions of a person's experiences are hidden. Using generic labels masks important invisibilities. Intersectional approaches "help to make the invisible visible". They can also promote a "process of discovery" as recognition and inclusion of a vulnerable or marginalised group may reveal additional, previously invisible, groups" (Chaplin et al., 2019, p. 31).

This resonates with VAWG prevention literature that centres marginalized voices as a core component of intersectional approaches to make the invisible visible (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Bose, 2012; Sosa, 2017; UN Women, 2019). Women experience both increased risk of violence and compounded suffering when violence against them is invisibilized (Sosa, 2017; McCleary-Sills, 2018).

Government and service data can play an important role in making visible what is and what is not being counted (Chaplin et al., 2019). Reports are paying more attention to the role of administrative data in making VAWG visible and the risks of exclusion from those data of certain groups of women, who may not be represented (Kendall, 2020). Attention is drawn to the need to collect carefully disaggregated data around VAWG prevention and also to analyse it with a view to how its intersecting dimensions connect. Concerns

are expressed that many current data collection tools are not designed to capture intersecting vulnerabilities adequately (Chaplin et al., 2019).

Intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention point to the risks of making some vulnerabilities visible while other identities remain invisibilized (Walby et al., 2012b; Margalit, 2019). Increased policy and legal visibility of certain identity-based vulnerabilities may lead to dynamic, circumstantial vulnerabilities being ignored (Sosa, 2017). Donors and policymakers must take care not to perpetuate the increased visibility of certain intersections at the expense of others (Kumar, 2018). Analysing what is made visible can form a point of departure for developing intersectional approaches (Sosa, 2017).

A number of intersecting vulnerabilities are receiving attention in VAWG prevention literature and thus becoming more visible. UN human rights conventions have driven engagement with particular VAWG-related intersections, for example sexual and gender identities (Blondeel et al., 2018; Fraser and Wood, 2018; Margalit, 2019), and disabilities (Mastonshoeva, 2020) in VAWG prevention. Attention has also been paid to the intersection of gender with HIV and AIDS (Leburu and Phetlho-Thekisho, 2015), as well as intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention in post-conflict settings (Swaine et al., 2019). A focus on one particular type of VAWG-related intersection is common. However, a gap exists on how VAWG prevention practitioners deal with the invisibilization of intersecting vulnerabilities and its challenges. Another gap noted was the limited attention given to the role that internalized stigma may play in compounding vulnerabilities of some women to violence. There is a focus on the risks of voices being marginalized and excluded (Kumar, 2018; Stephens et al., 2018) but little detail on how internalized stigma contributes to the invisibilization of certain intersections (Jackson-Best and Edwards, 2018) and how this can be addressed. This section contributes to this and highlights how VAWG prevention practitioners find ways to create visibility and reduce internalized stigma.

A key theme emerging across the projects was how invisible many compounding vulnerabilities in women's lives remain. Many intersections as a result of which some women experience vulnerability to violence were still unacknowledged and even unseen in some places by a range of actors, including themselves, their families and communities, and the wider legal and policy systems of support such as VAWG prevention services. Multilevel invisibility often increases many women's exposure to violence and can mean specific needs remain ignored or are unmet. This is why making intersecting vulnerabilities more visible to all stakeholders for VAWG prevention was identified by practitioners as a crucial first task. In engaging in several different domains to address these invisibilities in practice, the 10 organizations learned a number of lessons.

A first step for many was the intentional collection and analysis of disaggregated data to make the initial case for engagement with groups with intersecting vulnerabilities. For example, in Zimbabwe, LCDZ's decision to focus on GWWD emerged from a realization that these women and girls were missing from police and government statistics, which meant that resources were not being allocated to them, as noted in the literature. Paying attention to the types of violence against women that dominate in the data is also important. Physical forms of violence are often more visible, with information on intersecting emotional, verbal and economic forms of violence less likely to be collected or analysed.

Recognizing that women are not a homogeneous group is essential. Creating large catch-all categories (e.g. all Syrian women) may invisibilize those in this larger category with heightened vulnerabilities (e.g. teenage Syrian girls who are out of school). Different groups of women may have different priorities and needs, and may face different barriers, and the violence against them may be driven by different social root causes and perpetrators. Homogenization of their complex realities under one category of "women's vulnerability" can draw attention away from the specific realities of those who face intersecting risks of violence, and why and how they do so. It may also further marginalize certain voices or identities in harmful ways. For example, a number of projects targeted the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women of sexual minorities whose needs were seen

to be left out of mainstream VAWG prevention efforts in their countries (which often still have a heterosexual bias). Practitioners noted that an intersectional approach helps to avoid homogenization:

I think, first of all, "women" is not a homogenous group, so intersectionality is a must [to be inclusive]. Secondly, the most vulnerable groups have no voices or very little voice, but, for a fair society, their needs have to be seen and to be met. So that's why that's important (FGD, 1 February 2021).

Second, invisibilization also takes place in local contexts of VAWG prevention where CSOs can inadvertently prioritize some groups, issues and types of VAWG at the expense of others. Practitioners from Equality in China pointed out that VAWG prevention experts may still have "blind spots" around specific intersections that make some women more vulnerable than others. For example, HelpAge in Moldova realized that organizations providing VAWG prevention services in the area remained unaware of the needs of older women and the violence they experienced in their homes, and as a result unwittingly ignored them. Despite many elderly women having age-related frailty (which, for example, can make the impact of physical VAWG more severe), many VAWG services providers were failing to take into account their specific needs and limitations, for example by assuming their mobility. Other age-related vulnerabilities such as mental health, chronic illness or disabilities can further compound invisibilization. HelpAge project evaluations showed that, because of their age, older women could feel hopeless, trapped in internalized cultural norms about gender roles, and feel that it was "too late" to leave violent relationships, making them limited by fear and dependency, and reluctant to seek help. HelpAge focused on making service providers more aware of older women's increased risk of experiencing domestic violence, including emotional and economic neglect by caregivers. HelpAge set up multidisciplinary mobile teams and equipped VAWG prevention service providers with creative ways to use drama, stories and art to enable older women to recognize their experiences as violence.

At the same time, one initially visible vulnerability may snowball into more diverse additional vulnerabilities that become visible only as the programme continues and more trust is built. In practice, it may be unrealistic to expect projects to identify all vulnerabilities at the start, even when they are committed to intersectionality. An ongoing process of adaption needs to be built in to deal with new intersections becoming visible to VAWG prevention practitioners as they develop relationships of trust with women. For example, RSAT in Thailand found that in the lives of many transgender women, sex work formed an initially hidden aspect. Revealing this aspect then surfaced other, associated vulnerabilities (e.g. drug and alcohol addiction). Over time, transgender women felt safe to talk about their specific health challenges, including access to hormone therapy. As a result, however, tensions emerged between the priorities of many lesbian women and those of transgender women (who wanted to focus more on issues of prisons and the military). RSAT's approach centred a highly invisible group (transgender women) but may have risked drowning out other invisibilized voices (those of lesbian women). However, simply splitting the groups would ignore the reality that some women were both lesbian and transgender. On reflecting in FGDs, RSAT practitioners suggested that more thought is needed around how organizations focusing on those with diverse sexual and gender identities can connect more visibly with wider feminist movements to collaborate more effectively for change.

A third issue that emerged was **the reality of stigma and discrimination as vicious cycles present across many levels (individual, group, community and systems)**. Practitioners highlighted that stigma was internalized by many project participants and had intersecting dimensions. For example, LCDZ in Zimbabwe identified disability-related stigma, which made women with disabilities feel that they were socially of no use and left them often unable to communicate to share their experiences of violence. This compounded the stigma of experiencing sexual violence. Work by FSIS with migrant self-identified sex workers in Guatemala showed how the stigma attached to sex work was compounded by the stigmatization of, and discrimination against, migrants, meaning that police could abuse their power over these self-identified sex workers with impunity and even become perpetrators of sexual violence. These intersecting forms of stigma have consequences for the invisibilization of certain women or of certain aspects of their identity or occupations; for example, women may not want to reveal that they engage in sex work and may therefore be excluded from programmes that target only self-identified sex workers. For example, RSAT in Thailand found that women of diverse sexual orientation or gender identity justifiably fear the social consequences or increased risk of violence that may accompany them "coming out". A key consequence of this stigma is that many potential project participants may choose not to access VAWG prevention services, as they fear the social shame associated with visibility. As a result, confidentiality becomes even more important in programming in these spaces, to enable vulnerable groups to feel safe enough to speak up without negative consequences.

Many projects found that it was **essential to work with the women themselves, focusing on internalized self-stigma that "normalized" violence as something they felt they deserved**. Lack of voice can be shaped by internalized self-stigma, where, for example, older women in Moldova internalized dominant social norms and often blamed themselves for the domestic violence they experienced. This focus often had to be a first step, as no other work with these women could be done until they understood that the violence they experienced was undeserved. For example, tools such as the Violentometer were developed by FSIS in Guatemala to help marginalized women to recognize and name types of violence in their lives. Furthermore, psychosocial support for project participants on this journey is essential. For example, in Jamaica, during roll-out, full-time psychologists were added to JASL's programme, while in Jordan project evaluations found that women and girls did not feel comfortable accessing formal services but wanted peers to turn to for help. This shaped the decisions to set up informal women's support groups and girls' networks.

At the same time, work was also required to address stigma and discrimination faced by women when they sought help. Projects in Guatemala, Zimbabwe, Thailand, Serbia and Moldova addressed the social stigma and discrimination that groups of women that they worked with faced by engaging with wider health-service providers, the police and law courts. These projects highlight how stigmatizing attitudes exist in a reinforcing vicious cycle with discriminatory structures. Legal and policy documents are written in ways that reinforce

existing bias and as a result further marginalize groups of women with vulnerabilities. As the project in Moldova showed, local VAWG prevention services are not immune to this and can manifest bias as well as stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes to certain groups of women. These insights on stigma address an important gap in the literature.

At the same time, **heightened visibility, although a key goal for practitioners that focus on women with intersecting vulnerabilities, can risk increasing the stigma and discrimination that these groups face.** This can have implications for project programming. For example, RSAT identified a gap between government political rhetoric around Thailand as an "LGBT paradise" and the realities of ongoing non-acceptance of lesbian and transgender women by much of the local population, including the younger generation. Making these aspects of identity visible may come with significant risks for women who seek to pass as straight or cisgender to stay safe. If women have to return home to rural areas (as many were forced to do because of COVID-19) and cannot pass as straight or cisgender, this visibility may make them more vulnerable to violence related to their sexual and gender identity. RSAT had to take these risks of visibility into account when it redesigned its training curriculum. Its original plan (designed in the light of new national gender laws) of equipping these women to be public advocates for human rights policy changes on sexual and gender-related discrimination and violence therefore proved overambitious.

Fourth, another layer of invisibility identified by practitioners lies at the structural level and shows how **visibility is tied to systemic power relations, making violence either visible or invisible in society through laws, policies and religious institutions, and the assumptions that underlie them**. Violence can be embedded in a system that enables or justifies it. For example, in Zimbabwe, LCDZ identified certain churches as places where disability-related stigma and exclusion were reinforced, adding to family shame and the practice of hiding away those with disabilities. According to MDRI-S practitioners in Serbia, most women with mental disabilities have no formal legal capacity, to, for example, marry, vote or sign a contract, and policy regulations can create new layers of legal invisibility.

MDRI-S in Serbia noted that the situation of women with mental and intellectual disabilities in residential institutions is also harder than the situation of the men in these institutions, with women being at a higher risk of violence, especially gender-based violence. Women and girls are subjected to both violence from other residents and violence from institutional staff. Multidimensional power relations intersect in this space, where violence is related simultaneously to male/female, abled/disabled and carer/patient power dynamics. Their legal institutionalization, even though MDRI-S feels that many have the capacity to live safely in assisted community housing, removes many other rights. In these institutions, structural forms of reproductive violence also remain invisible, including forced contraception, forced abortion and forced separation from their children. These women are hyperinvisible to the community. Raising awareness of this systemic invisibility among service providers, government and families, as well as the women themselves, is essential to begin to change the existing laws and policies that underpin its continuation. Working only in the existing system would perpetuate this invisibility. **Sometimes, underlying systems that enable violence and create invisibility have to be changed for real progress to be made.** This impacted MDRI-S's decision to advocate for policy and legal changes to deinstitutionalize some women and its work to develop supported, community-assisted living models. Law and policy reform is seen by MDRI-S as an essential step in tackling the compounded vulnerabilities that shape these women's lives in the long term.

Finally, the need for visibility applies not only to those experiencing these vulnerabilities but also to perpetrators. Practitioners insisted on this being an essential task in need of more work in many of their contexts. Particularly vulnerable groups of women, such as those with disabilities, are often targeted by perpetrators specifically because violence against them is more likely to remain hidden. Perpetrators therefore benefit from increased impunity. For example, in Serbia, the closed nature of institutional spaces means that perpetrators can offend and reoffend with impunity and their actions remain invisible to, and are ignored by, society. In response, MDRI-S has recently published a report produced in collaboration with women with disabilities in institutions (entitled *Here the Walls Have Ears Too: Testimonies of Women with Mental Disabilities about*

Gender-based Violence in Residential Institutions) to make this violence more publicly visible. Likewise, FSIS in Guatemala found ways to increase the visibility not only of how self-identified sex workers experience compounded vulnerabilities to violence but also of the power relations behind this violence. To do this, the organization worked directly with groups of men, namely self-identified sex worker clients and those in the police and military forces, to make their roles more visible and to work to change these power relations.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Women's overlapping vulnerabilities are frequently invisibilized in a number of domains, including data collection and analysis, service delivery and self-perception, and at a wider systems level. If women are treated as a homogeneous group, this invisibilization and silencing of certain voices and vulnerabilities often remains. Projects had to give attention to many of these domains concurrently to make these interconnected layers of invisibility visible.

- Internal and external forms of stigma and discrimination intersect in the lives of many project participants and sensitive engagement is required. There are risks to certain intersections becoming visible, for example being identified as a sex worker, or sharing your HIV-positive status, and these need to be understood and taken seriously in projects.

- Practitioners identified making perpetration and perpetrators more visible in specific contexts as a core task that needs more work. The continued invisibility of perpetration was seen to enable a culture of impunity, providing an excuse for society to ignore VAWG and for systems not to be held accountable.

Women attend a programme through War Child Canada in Jordan which works to support refugee and Jordanian women survivors of violence.
Photo: War Child Canada

2.3. Participation in intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature suggests that women who are vulnerable to violence because of intersecting aspects of their identities or circumstances have diverse experiences, expertise, knowledge and strengths that need to be included, understood and built on to develop successful VAWG prevention strategies and programming (Chaplin et al., 2018). Four important dimensions to this participation in VAWG prevention can be identified in the literature.

First, literature on intersectional VAWG prevention approaches highlights that programming should be designed around both the practical needs and priorities of project participants (arising from the particular conditions to which they have been subjected, for example limited access to health care (Molyneux, 1985)) and their strategic needs and priorities (e.g. sexual and reproductive health and rights, which are crucial to addressing their subordination (Molyneux, 1985; UN Women, 2019)). Addressing both practical and strategic needs can assist in ensuring that programming is relevant and impactful for project participants in the short and long term. Second, the literature shows that interventions that involve women who are vulnerable to violence because of intersecting aspects of their identities or circumstances in programme design and implementation (thus recognizing them as experts on their own needs and lived realities) can ensure that the VAWG prevention programming is appropriate and effective (UN Women, 2019). Furthermore, some argue that such representation should also include holding positions of leadership and power in programming, involving project participants at all levels of intervention roll-out, including as salaried staff members and/or board members. This can ensure that project participants are not included in a token manner and that, rather, their lived experiences of intersecting vulnerabilities consistently frames not only project priorities and activities but also organizational priorities and activities (UN Women, 2019). Third, the literature shows that a lack of understanding of the capabilities of those who experience multiple vulnerabilities can lead to discriminatory interventions. If their capabilities, rights and dignity are not recognized (through having them participate in programme design and implementation), interventions run the risk of being disempowering (Chaplin et al., 2019). Finally, participation by these women can help to uncover and create understandings of dominant power dynamics, and in the process can help to facilitate the design of equitable and inclusive interventions (Chaplin et al., 2019).

The literature also highlights that having women who experience multiple vulnerabilities participate in VAWG prevention programming design and roll-out should not be done only for strategic reasons (Chaplin et al., 2018). Intersectionality emphasizes that women who are part of groups with intersecting vulnerabilities have a fundamental right to participation in and ownership of programming that focuses on them: "Vulnerable and marginalized people have the right and agency to build their own resilience. Such recognition is critical for building resilience; however, few approaches and strategies recognize this agency" (Chaplin et al., 2018, p. 9). While literature on intersectionality speaks of the importance of representation and participation of groups with intersecting vulnerabilities, more research is needed on what such participation looks like in practice in VAWG prevention work. This includes analysis of its challenges and advantages in different settings and how power relations between and within groups may be involved in this. It should also be recognized that many CSOs are chronically underresourced and understaffed. Participation by project participants can run the risk of adding additional burdens to those who are already struggling, and many organizations often simply do not have the money to pay them. In the existing body of literature on intersectionality and VAWG prevention in particular, there is currently limited detailed reflection on what participation can look like in such realities, despite it being a concept that is widely used in inclusive development as a way of centring marginalized voices (Stephens et al., 2018).

All 10 projects included in this synthesis review highlighted **the importance of having the specific group or groups with multiple vulnerabilities that a project focuses on in its programming participate meaningfully in the design and implementation of programming**. Experiences from these projects strongly affirmed literature findings, with practitioner learning emphasizing that these groups should be viewed as more than just beneficiaries, because their insights and contributions resulted in more appropriate and impactful programming. While they viewed and included participation in different ways (and did not do so comprehensively in all settings), the 10 projects showcased a wide range of practices around participatory design and implementation.

Projects found that participation requires not only that women with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence assist in the development of project design but also that during project implementation there is a willingness to adapt and evolve programme design based on their needs and priorities. This is what FSIS found in Guatemala when working with migrant self-identified sex workers. Even though it designed its programming with the participation of this specific group, rapid adaptation and redesign were still required. For example, during the first year of programming, FSIS conducted a workshop on sexual and reproductive rights. During the workshop, practitioners saw that the women did not see this as their most important current concern and lost interest in the topic. Halting the prepared session, they facilitated a discussion that allowed the women to identify their greatest needs and priorities. It was only during this discussion that FSIS learned that migrant self-identified sex workers are subject to regular raids by the police, as they do not have personal identification documents. This was their greatest need and priority. This new knowledge led to a radical adaptation of programming, and FSIS started to engage with government embassies to assist migrant self-identified sex workers to obtain the required documentation. From this point onwards, FSIS regularly carried out focus groups with migrant self-identified sex workers, so that they could define their needs and identify priorities. FSIS's experiences in Guatemala affirm literature arguing that project participants' needs and priorities should determine programme design.

A number of projects involved groups with multiple vulnerabilities in the design of the project curriculum. In Serbia, for example, MDRI-S organized several sessions with women with mental and intellectual disabilities, where draft materials were workshopped. The women gave important suggestions and corrections, making the material more accessible and easier to read. This participatory development process took more time than originally planned but was seen as worthwhile by all involved. Curriculum design can, however, also be participatory in less formal ways. For example, WCC's women's support group methodology in Jordan required that the women themselves identify the issues they would like to discuss during the group sessions. There was, therefore, no set curriculum that all support groups had to work through. The facilitator would prepare sessions according to themes and priorities set by the group, and project participants would co-facilitate the sessions.

If organizations do not clearly understand the situation and needs of the group or groups with multiple vulnerabilities to violence that they serve, it can mean that the curricula they design will be inappropriate. RSAT experienced this in its work with lesbian and transgender women in Thailand. The workshop curriculum was designed to guide participants in taking advocacy actions. However, many of the workshop participants faced significant stigmatizing obstacles in their personal and family lives that they needed support with, and they did not feel ready or motivated to focus on higher level policy-related advocacy. This meant that RSAT had to significantly redesign its curriculum to fit the needs of project participants. This realization was a slow process and led to backlash and criticism on the content and methods of the original approach from participants and staff. This could have been avoided if the curriculum had been designed from the start with the groups for whom it was intended, to ensure that their voices and needs were centred. Revising the curriculum meant that RSAT had to reorient its original goals of immediately placing lesbian and transgender women in advocacy groups.

Participation in design can also result in positively transforming identity markers of vulnerable groups to empower them. Fundación Mundubat's project targeted poor Afro-Colombian and indigenous women living in rural areas. In designing the accompaniment and support

systems for these women, it drew on ancestral healing practices typical of Afro-Colombian spirituality. In this way, the organization intentionally leaned into project participants' identity, by designing programming that was uniquely appropriate to the group. Fundación Mundubat's programming affirms literature arguing that interventions need to recognize the capabilities, rights and dignity of projects participants if they are to be empowering, and it also offers a very clear example of how such recognition can be embodied in programming content.

Many of the projects involved groups with multiple vulnerabilities to violence not only in the design of programming but also in project implementation. Several projects identified peer-to-peer engagement as particularly effective when working with groups with intersecting vulnerabilities, whose sense of isolation and marginalization contributes to their vulnerability. The work of HelpAge in Moldova illustrated this. HelpAge's project focused on older women experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, violence at home and in the community. It prioritized a volunteer model, which mobilized local older women themselves as volunteers, countering the status quo (as volunteering was seen there as something done only by younger people). HelpAge realized that older women internalize a lot of shame about their experiences of violence, and it was therefore easier for them to talk to and disclose their experiences to a peer. When at-risk women did not want to access official channels or struggled with mobility or age-related disability, these older volunteers could bring information to the homes of those at risk in ways that did not draw public attention (as they would appear to be just a friend visiting). Volunteers were key intermediaries between women in the community and specialists (e.g. psychologists and the police). By being in the community, they could identify women and situations that needed intervention and provide or facilitate such intervention. With HelpAge providing mentoring and support to the older volunteers, volunteering among older women has now become a more accepted concept in the communities where it works, with older volunteers becoming passionate about what they do and the purpose and community connection it gives to their own lives.

Practitioners engaging in peer-to-peer VAWG prevention work in Moldova, and also in similar work taking place in

Jordan, China, Jamaica, Colombia and Thailand, saw such engagement with groups of women with intersecting vulnerabilities as important for a number of reasons. First, the women who belong to these groups are often highly marginalized and invisibilized (as noted in section 2.2). It is not always easy for project staff to identify those most in need of assistance, but they can often be identified by their peers. Second, these vulnerable individuals may be uncomfortable with receiving home visits from project staff who are visibly identifiable by neighbours or may face specific barriers (e.g. mobility or stigmatizing attitudes) that prevent them from going to project sites or accessing formal public services. However, if approached by a peer, or accompanied by a peer, there is often more willingness to do so. Third, many of these women's life experiences have taught them not to trust outsiders easily. Projects in this synthesis review stressed that peers can be particularly effective in earning and building trust with these women in VAWG prevention activities and the organization implementing them.

For a number of projects, women with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence were part of the process of training other service providers. Practitioners found that, because of the direct engagement and discussions carefully facilitated during the workshops, service providers (including the police) grew more empathetic towards the targeted populations and their needs. For example, by having a woman with disabilities or a woman who is HIV-positive present and listening to her share her stories and experiences, these vulnerabilities become less abstract and service providers' understanding and willingness to engage with these groups grow. At the same time, **dominant power dynamics are subverted, with "beneficiaries" becoming "expert activists", and those seen as vulnerable becoming the centre of learning and teaching**. Of course, these women must not be included in ways that instrumentalize them. Should they agree to do this, they need mentoring and ongoing support to avoid retraumatization. Including women in this way was a key strategy for JASL in Jamaica:

The first thing we did … we built up a cadre of women from the different groups. They were very instrumental in delivering training, especially to

the policymakers; they gave their stories. They were the ones who kind of delivered and shared their experiences with policy officers and health-care workers, sharing what it was like and what they would have wanted. So they were a key part of the implementation (FGD, 29 January 2021).

Participation by project participants in advocacy activities emerged as a particularly effective approach and strategy for VAWG prevention for many projects, as long as the organizations **first paid attention to the immediate needs and priorities of the women and enabled them to set the advocacy agenda** (again, affirming literature calling for the centralization of project participants' needs and priorities). Where individuals with multiple vulnerabilities to violence shared their experiences of marginalization and violence, community members, service providers, policymakers and government representatives appeared to be less prone to ignoring it. In Jamaica, JASL prioritized this form of advocacy to the extent that project staff viewed themselves as only providing technical support (by organizing the engagement), with the women from the target groups as the speakers. Using its second round of funding from the UN Trust Fund, MDRI-S prioritized self-advocacy by women with mental and intellectual disabilities, for example by supporting a self-advocacy group of these women. While COVID-19 has delayed this group's ability to develop a report to be presented to the Serbian Government, MDRI-S remains committed to supporting the self-advocacy process by women with mental and intellectual disabilities. The experience of RSAT in Thailand (discussed above) does highlight, however, that not all project participants will necessarily be ready or willing to do such self-advocacy. Furthermore, it might not be safe for them to do so. Moreover, there is the risk that, by making the participation of women with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence compulsory, they may become instrumentalized, for example through token inclusion at meetings without genuine opportunity for input. One way of overcoming this is by formally partnering with organizations that represent particular groups with compounded vulnerabilities to violence (explored further in section 2.4).

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Lessons learned from practitioners working with women with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence emphasize the importance of having these women participate meaningfully in the design and implementation of the VAWG prevention programming. This can allow lived experiences to guide the intervention's design and strategies, and it has the potential to positively transform identity markers of vulnerable groups to build resilience. Participation is a requirement of intersectional practice and enables greater programme uptake and impact.

- Based on the experiences of a number of the projects focused on in this synthesis review, peer-to-peer engagement can be a promising approach in VAWG prevention programming for groups with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence. Peers appear to have a unique ability to identify, reach and impact such individuals. The importance of the participation of women with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence in the implementation of programming (even if not through a peer-to-peer approach) emerged as crucial to all the projects included in this synthesis review.

- Advocacy by individuals with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence is often effective in countering invisibilization of their groups, motivating other stakeholders to respond to their particular realities and needs, and empowering these women. Furthermore, it challenges the dominant power dynamics, by placing those with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence in positions of power in relation to those who often hold power over them.

2.4. Partnering for intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention

LITERATURE REVIEW

An intersectional approach to VAWG prevention highlights the many different ways that women may be made vulnerable to violence. Nevertheless, intersectionality does not require that all practitioners should become a "jack of all trades" (Chaplin et al., 2018, p. 33). By linking with organizations that focus on different groups with compounded vulnerabilities, practitioners can ensure intersectional awareness and inclusivity without expanding their own focus (Chaplin et al., 2018). Partnering with "by and for" organizations is identified as a promising practice, as such organizations can work efficiently and effectively in meeting the intersecting needs of the women that they focus on (UN Women, 2019). "By and for" organizations are run by and for women belonging to the group in question and are therefore "insiders" dedicated to serving the specific group, with personal knowledge of the complexity of their lived realities:

The vision, mission and ways of working of such organisations are framed by minoritised women's needs and unique experiences of oppression.

Minoritised women themselves determine organisational priorities and strategic direction. Importantly, the presence of minoritised women is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organisations (UN Women, 2019, p. 6).

In the literature there is a tension between views that argue that all groups with intersecting vulnerabilities should be treated as being of equal importance and views that argue that certain intersections (and, as a result, certain groups) should be prioritized based on the evidence in the specific context (Walby et al., 2012b). The reality is that competition around limited funding can threaten a feminist understanding of VAWG prevention, which calls for it to be collaborative (Kumar, 2018). There is a gap in the existing literature around how different partnerships on intersecting vulnerabilities may play out in practice in VAWG prevention work. Practical questions around partner selection, different partnering strategies, and the benefits and challenges of partnering require more attention.

A number of the organizations included in this synthesis review used a partnership approach to include in their programming a range of different groups of women who are vulnerable to violence because of intersecting aspects of their identities or circumstances. **By explicitly seeking out partnerships with organizations that focus on and represent a group with specific intersecting vulnerabilities** (e.g. an organization representing lesbian women, or an organization focusing on people with disabilities) they ensured that the overall programme focused on VAWG prevention in a range of groups whose vulnerabilities to violence all intersected in different ways with gender. In seeking out partnership organizations that work with and for specific groups of women who experience multiple vulnerabilities, they

affirmed the emphasis in the literature on partnering with organizations that are run by and for those from the group that they represent. Such a partnership approach also (in some cases) ensured that programming could take a more intersectional approach to vulnerabilities from the initial conceptualization and design stage, without each organization having to try to do everything. In some of the organizations (e.g. JASL in Jamaica) these partnerships were formed during the course of the project roll-out. In other cases (e.g. Equality in China), the partnership and collaboration between the different organizations was part of the project design from the start. As the discussion below explores, the organizations' different approaches to partnering reveal the advantages of and challenges posed by such formal VAWG prevention partnerships

between organizations that serve different groups that are vulnerable to violence in multiple compounded ways.

Equality in China works to address domestic violence, but the organization realized that domestic violence takes different forms and has different implications for different groups of women. Therefore, it partnered with Common Language (an organization specifically supporting LBT women), the Women's Network against AIDS in China (an organization focusing on women with HIV and AIDS) and Media Monitor for Women Network (which specializes in mobilizing young people and the use of new forms of media). **These organizations had a history of cooperation on which they could draw to design a collaborative project** that engaged with LBT women, women affected by HIV and young women, with a particular focus on creating shared awareness of domestic violence and the legislation relevant to it. For Equality, these partnerships were critical for ensuring that the various organizations and the groups that they represent all grew in their capacity to understand and address domestic violence and how it impacts the lives of different groups of women. As part of the project's focus on legislative advocacy around China's new domestic violence law, the project first created enough room for each organization to explore how domestic violence uniquely affects its focus population, how relevant legislation applies to and/or is ineffective in addressing the population's needs, and what advocacy is needed to address these needs. The knowledge and tools developed during this step were then shared with the partner organizations, for the benefit of all. For example, Common Language developed a stand-alone training module on sexual and gender identity, which could easily be incorporated into any other training dealing with domestic violence more generally. All of the partner organizations were then trained with this module and able to use it as needed.

Many of Equality's experiences are echoed by those of other organizations that followed a similar approach, such as Corporación Humanas in Chile and JASL in Jamaica, and such partnerships between organizations focusing on different groups with unique, overlapping vulnerabilities to violence were identified as a valuable practice by a number of organizations included in this synthesis review. **First, as various specific groups of women are marginalized in many societies and are often uniquely at risk of and**

affected by VAWG (e.g. women with disabilities, LBT women and women with HIV), it can help to have specific organizations, with the relevant authority, representation and expertise, engage with each group of women in ways that are appropriate to them, without homogenizing their needs. The partnership experiences of Equality, Corporación Humanas and JASL therefore support literature that highlights that partnerships allows VAWG prevention interventions to include different groups of women who experience multiple vulnerabilities to violence, without overburdening any one organization. **Second, the different organizations can learn from each other, support each other and be trained and upskilled alongside each other.** Third, this is especially necessary, as noted during the FGDs, in the light of VAWG prevention donors requiring more project management and complex paperwork. Small organizations often do not have the capacity to deliver on such administrative demands and can then easily be overlooked or ignored by these donors. This is despite smaller organizations often being better known and more accessible to the women who donors seek to reach. Partnerships such as those funded by the UN Trust Fund can therefore have operational advantages, since they allow organizations to pool their financial and human resources. Such partnerships also allow smaller organizations to collaborate to apply for bigger grants, as one organization found:

Independent NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in [our country] are very small. We have very limited human resources … and an unfriendly political environment. So, if we want to get [funding], we need a coalition of NGOs. Together, we have stronger human resources [and] we can implement a bigger project. I think this is a first very practical advantage (FGD, 1 February 2021).

Fourth, as Corporación Humanas in Chile found, partnering with other organizations for VAWG prevention acknowledges these organizations' expertise and credibility, and recognizes their years of service to a particular group. As a partnership between five organizations that each represented a different group of women with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence

(migrant women, women with HIV, lesbian and bisexual women, transgender self-identified sex workers and women with disabilities) demonstrated, inclusion in such a partnership can motivate and empower different organizations. The synergies built by working together and developing a shared agenda further empowered all the partner organizations and made them and their work more visible.

Fifth, in terms of advocacy, partnerships are a major strength, as joint platforms and activities tend to generate more interest and can amplify the voices of women and girls made vulnerable to violence in multiple ways. This, in turn, strengthens synergies and ongoing willingness to collaborate. For example, while the partner organizations in China all did advocacy work independently, Equality also created joint opportunities for advocacy. For example, it organized a joint national conference entitled "Implementation of the National Domestic Violence Law: From the Perspectives of Disadvantaged Women". As part of this two-day event, groups with different compounded vulnerabilities to violence (e.g. lesbian women and women living with HIV) presented together, rather than individually. This allowed them to identify common issues and build synergy in their anti-domestic-violence advocacy work.

Sixth, partnerships between organizations can allow women to receive the integrated, holistic support they need, rather than having to engage with different organizations in different spaces. An intersectional approach to vulnerabilities highlights that women's lives reach across identities and experiences in and across various groups that are not simply situated neatly in one category. For example, a woman can be both HIV-positive and living with a disability, but currently many different organizations respond to each of the vulnerabilities separately, which does not reflect how these women experience them in their own lives. This was identified as important by JASL in Jamaica:

As a practitioner, you really need to work with others who are in your sector because they are also serving, sometimes, the same women. So, you want to be on the same page … The women,

it gave them a sense that they didn't have to be somebody else everywhere else that they needed to access a service. It gave them a sense of "my needs are being addressed and I don't need to say one thing here and say something else over there" … They didn't have to split up themselves to access services from the different entities (FGD, 29 January 2021).

However, VAWG prevention partnerships also face some challenges in working together. Different organizations may have different leadership structures, visions, styles and organizational cultures, and different skills and approaches to doing VAWG prevention work. While this can be good for collaborative work, it can also cause friction and hamper effective communication and collaboration. It can take time and resources to overcome these challenges and develop agreements and systems that can ensure success and sustainability. Furthermore, the reality is that, as Corporación Humanas found in its work in Chile, organizations representing a specific group that is made vulnerable to violence in compounded ways are often staffed by activists who are working in an unpaid or volunteer capacity at the organization, or are contracted only for a limited amount of time. This means they may not have much time or many resources to allocate to collaborative learning and exchange. Furthermore, it is not always easy to work with different groups with compounded vulnerabilities to violence together. The different groups may stigmatize each other, even when they have some challenges in common. For example, Fundación Mundubat found that Afro-Colombian and indigenous women could stigmatize and discriminate against each other and had to design programming to allow the exchange of knowledge and building of trust between these groups of women. In identifying these challenges, lessons learned by practitioners address some of the gaps in the existing literature on partnering for VAWG prevention between different groups with compounded vulnerabilities to different forms of violence.

Partnerships between organizations that were targeting specific (but different) groups vulnerable to violence worked well when it was some organizations' first entry into VAWG prevention work. Awareness-raising about

groups with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence, advocacy for their rights and protection, and lobbying for necessary changes in the law are all VAWG prevention activities suited to partnerships between organizations. Specific organizations can adapt these activities to suit their particular group, and organizations can work to formulate and promote a shared agenda that does not homogenize the important differences between the various groups. Practitioner learning emphasizes that partnering for VAWG prevention can run the risk of homogenizing all groups that are vulnerable to violence. Partnering experiences highlight the importance of avoiding such homogenization between groups (e.g. women with disabilities, women with HIV, and women with diverse sexual and gender identities) but also the dangers of homogenizing within a group vulnerable to violence in compounded ways (e.g. women with disabilities). At the same time, practitioners highlight that it is possible to develop partnerships that do not homogenize these different groups.

There are, however, instances where partnership approaches may not work so effectively, especially when specialized activities are developed. For example, in Colombia, Fundación Mundubat developed uniquely tailored support strategies by focusing on a specific compounded intersecting vulnerability due to the combination of gender, ethnicity and location. If it had partnered with other organizations targeting groups with other vulnerabilities to violence, it would not have been able to develop and roll out such unique strategies, as these would not have been suitable for other groups. MDRI-S in Serbia also found it important to have an exclusive focus on women with disabilities in institutions, since the challenges and limitations for this group are so unique. Corporación Humanas found this with its partnerships in Chile: the work of its partner Circulo Emancipador de Mujeres y Niñas con Discapacidad de Chile (CIMUNIDIS) – an organization for women with disabilities – highlighted the diverse needs attached to different disabilities (visual, intellectual, physical, etc.), making it hard for CIMUNIDIS to comprehensively respond to what is supposed to be its target population. To address this challenge, CIMUNIDIS constantly engaged with those

with different disabilities, asking for their guidance. Often the needs were very different: for example, those with mental disabilities might prefer a workshop with lots of opportunities to talk and exchange personal stories, while those with hearing impairments might prefer workshops with more visual content (e.g. photographs and videos).

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Partnerships for VAWG prevention between organizations representing different groups with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence have a number of advantages. These include enabling VAWG prevention work to reach women more holistically across their intersecting realities, maximizing resources and learning through sharing, empowering organizations, and building synergies that have greater impact and can serve these different women more effectively and holistically.

- Partnering for VAWG prevention can be challenging when organizational cultures clash, project members have limited time, or different groups hold pre-existing biases against each other that need to be addressed. Findings from practitioners highlight that, by partnering for VAWG prevention, organizations run the risk of homogenizing the different needs *between* different groups vulnerable to violence (e.g. women with disabilities and women with HIV), but there is also a danger of homogenizing the differences *within* one group (e.g., needs of women with intellectual versus physical disabilities).

- VAWG prevention partnerships appear to work well, and avoid homogenization, when an organization is doing VAWG prevention work for the first time and/ or when the project focuses on awareness-raising activities and advocacy. In contrast, if programming is meant to address and respond to the unique realities of a specific group vulnerable to violence in compounded ways, it can become more difficult to work effectively in partnership.

2.5. COVID-19, intersectional approaches and VAWG prevention

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic draws attention to intersectional approaches, especially literature by feminist scholars concerned with VAWG prevention (Heard, 2020; Imkaan, 2020; Lokot and Avakyan, 2020; UN Women, 2020b). Intersectionality offers an important lens on the COVID-19 pandemic overall (Heard, 2020; Lokot et al., 2020), recognized not as a "great equalizer" but as compounding pre-existing vulnerabilities (Hankivsky and Kapilashrami., 2020; Lokot and Avakyan, 2020; Spiranovic et al., 2020; Wenham et al., 2020). It makes visible "a broader landscape of inequalities" (Wenham et al., 2020) and draws attention to underlying vulnerabilities that are affected in new ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender is one of these vulnerabilities, with VAWG described as a shadow or dual pandemic (UN Women, 2020). Spiranovic et al. note that, "the impact of COVID-19 will not be experienced in the same way and to the same degree by all women and children, due partly to intersecting forms of vulnerability" (2020, p. 5).

At the same time, society's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic can further invisibilize some forms of VAWG, which often flourishes in isolation (Imkaan, 2020; Lokot and Avakyan, 2020; Majumdar and Wood, 2020). A range of intersections (e.g. race, ethnicity, location, disability and class) shape who is marginalized by COVID-19 in practice (Wenham et al., 2020). Some intersections emerge as more important, such as reliance on informal carers (UN Women, 2020b) or homeless migrant women (Fernandez, 2021). There is a risk that COVID-19 may take attention and resources away from other important health issues for women (Lokot and Avakyan, 2020). Pre-existing (e.g. HIV) and new (e.g. unemployment) issues can intersect for women differently to increase their risk of contracting COVID-19 and the impact of COVID-19 responses (Spiranovic et al., 2020). An intersectional approach collects disaggregated data and emphasizes the importance of interpreting data in ways that identify specific risks and challenges and explore how they interact to shape COVID-19 risks and responses (Hankivsky and Kapilashrami, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic intersects in complex ways with VAWG prevention. Four primary intersections can be identified in the literature. First, there are increased, compounded risks of VAWG, where responses protective for COVID-19 may escalate VAWG risks (creating a "perfect storm" of social isolation, online abuse, school closures, and heightened economic and psychological stress) (Majumdar and Wood, 2020; Spiranovic et al., 2020). Lessons from patterns observed during other pandemics highlight a number of intersecting pathways between VAWG and pandemics (Peterman et al., 2020) and research round-ups are already showing complex compounding intersections between VAWG and the COVID-19 pandemic (Peterman and O'Donnell, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic also escalates intersecting risks for increased VAWG perpetration by men (e.g. increased unemployment or reduced mental health) (Spiranovic et al., 2020). Second, reduced protection and access to services especially for those most vulnerable, who face new barriers, including suspension of VAWG services; police, social services and judiciary overload, creating a culture of impunity; and reduced privacy. Pre-existing prejudices against certain groups may deepen and the needs of privileged women may predominate (Imkaan, 2020). Third, COVID-19 responses must avoid risking an increase in VAWG for some, requiring a gender-sensitive lens and disaggregated data analysis (Majumdar and Wood 2020; Spiranovic et al., 2020). A shift to digital services can, without care, reinforce new vulnerabilities due to digital gaps. Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic offers possibilities for innovation in VAWG prevention to fast-track intersectional approaches to VAWG (Lokot and Avakyan, 2020; UN Women, 2020). These intersecting pandemics place a responsibility on everyone to work towards a reimagined post-COVID-19 future in relation to VAWG prevention: "The two pandemics compel us to reimagine a different system … The analysis of the intersection of the two pandemics makes it clear that it cannot be business as usual in the post-COVID-19 period. Fundamental structural change is needed" (Imkaan, 2020, p. 4). One area that needs more work is to pay attention to larger power structures in COVID-19 responses in relation to VAWG prevention (Imkaan, 2020; Lokot and Avakyan, 2020). By bringing intersecting disadvantages to the fore, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a requirement for coalition building to ask questions about power and to explore what is prioritized, who benefits and who is left behind (Hankivsky and Kapilashrami, 2020).

A number of the 10 projects had VAWG prevention work under way in 2020 (but only some of these activities were still UN Trust Fund-funded). **First, all practitioners noted that COVID-19 made situations for the already vulnerable groups they engaged with worse**, by deepening existing marginalization and invisibility, adding new dimensions of risk and creating additional barriers to accessing services, both for women and girls and for CSOs seeking to provide VAWG services in an ongoing volatile and unpredictable macroenvironment.

FGDs highlighted that programme activities were suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organizations increased their use of social media or tried to find cost-free ways for people to report VAWG that they witnessed around them, such as by phone. Practitioners also cautioned against viewing reduced VAWG reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic as a sign of reduced VAWG. Under COVID-19, many governments' already stretched health budgets were often diverted to pandemic response, with issues such as disability, HIV and AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health and rights left even further behind. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also put a spotlight on some barriers that already existed for many vulnerable groups, such as limited mobility, communication challenges, removal from schools and lockdown with abusers. The literature highlights that integrating the needs of vulnerable groups into COVID-19 responses rather than leaving them to fall even further behind will be key going forward.

For example, as a result of government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, MDRI-S in Serbia witnessed extreme forms of increased isolation for women with mental disabilities in institutions. Existing patterns of violence deepened because of this hyperinvisibility, including abuse by institutional staff, which was already a significant concern before lockdown. MDRI-S also noted some concerning reversals of previous VAWG-prevention-related gains, for example women being reinstitutionalized from assisted-community-living models to "protect" them from COVID-19. Ironically, as a result of this heightened invisibility during the COVID-19 pandemic, the structural violence of being institutionalized has received more global attention, with World Health Organization recommendations advising deinstitutionalization. This has been a long-term area of focus for MDRI-S's work,

which is now of even greater importance, since COVID-19 responses resulted in total confinement for nearly a year for members of this vulnerable group, a situation described as "practical imprisonment". As a consequence, MDRI-S's ability to provide services and support or to play a watchdog role on perpetrator accountability has been severely hampered, leading to an almost total loss of support for these women, who are highly vulnerable to forms of violence. MDRI-S's training model is based on working with women outside institutions and cannot simply be adapted for online delivery, owing to the lack of privacy, technology and safety in these institutions. FGDs also highlighted new forms of violence, for example the abuse of women with disabilities as free labourers in institutions, where they become carers to others as a result of staff shortages, as well as severe isolation regulations (e.g. a visit to a doctor leading to total isolation on return for 14 days).

MDRI-S has tried extremely hard to adapt to these compounded challenges by working at multiple levels. At an individual level, project staff stayed in contact with a small group of women using mobile phones and WhatsApp, but many of the women they were working with had no data, no phone or no internet access, meaning it was hard to communicate or assess their needs. This shows the depth of these women's social isolation and how the digital divide affects some already marginalized groups more deeply. The supply of new phones to these women was prevented by MDRI-S not being allowed to deliver the phones to the women or train them in how to use them. This highlights the underlying lack of rights to any privacy or private communication in these institutions. At policy level, MDRI-S also adapted its advocacy to the COVID-19 pandemic, introducing a focus on the harmful practical implications of COVID-19 restrictions for people with disabilities. It wrote numerous letters to government policymakers to raise awareness of the different impact of lockdown on, for example, autistic people who need regular routines. It continued to play a watchdog role, requesting disaggregated data on COVID-19-related patient deaths and testing in residential institutions. At the heart of it approach is the need for some institutionalized women who have appropriate capacity to be supported into assisted community living. Focusing on this system-level aim could be one way that activities by MDRI-S

during the COVID-19 pandemic could also contribute towards long-term, structural VAWG prevention goals, as it noted in its reports. MDRI-S is aware that such a strategy needs to be carefully supported if it is not to create further harm for some women with mental disabilities, and it has worked with multiple service providers in the community to ensure that its recommended deinstitutionalization strategies are carefully thought through.

Similarly to the situation in Serbia, other organizations identify COVID-19 and responses to it as an additional new vulnerability that intersects with, and exacerbates, many existing structural vulnerabilities that they were already seeking to address, such as economic vulnerabilities for self-identified sex workers in Jamaica and Thailand, lack of access to justice for women with disabilities in Zimbabwe and limited access to other health services for those without the funds to pay in Guatemala:

[COVID-19 regulations] are affecting them strongly, since the restrictions do not allow them to work and have an income, which has plunged them into greater poverty. Their [lack of] access to services has increased because services such as health [clinics] have closed their outpatient consultations; there is only prioritizing care for COVID patients to counteract the pandemic, as if there were no chronic diseases, or reproductive health [needs]. If people cannot pay for private services that have become excessively expensive, there is no public care other than emergencies: surgical, trauma and obstetrics, for the moment (written reflection, FGD invitee, 1 February 2021).

Second, while COVID-19 brings some unique new challenges, it can still be understood in an intersecting vulnerabilities approach in ways that reinforce the need for specific attention to be given to those who may be worst affected or left behind at this time. **Many projects can draw on their past experiences of dealing with other emergencies or pandemics, such as HIV and AIDS or Ebola, and capitalize on lessons learned in those situations around VAWG prevention efforts.** This was the case in Zimbabwe, where LCDZ faced challenges due to COVID-19 in its work with GWWD, with programme implementation suspended, strict lockdown measures implemented and a state of national disaster declared, including the closure of courts and hospitals except for emergency cases. Lockdown also exposed GWWD to higher levels of domestic abuse at time when they had more limited access to assistance. However, as a result of community-based approaches developed during the HIV pandemic that shifted patterns of institutionalization overall, strong community-based structures of care had been developed. As a result, LCDZ's pre-existing VAWG local community committees continued to connect with GWWD even in the absence of formal programmes. One example of this increased visibility of women with disabilities in Zimbabwean communities during the COVID-19 crisis was an innovative adaptation by LCDZ whereby the project's prior activities to economically empower this group in the community were utilized as an asset for COVID-19 prevention, with women with disabilities sewing 500 facemasks in just one week; these were then distributed to various disability organization partners. This enabled women with disabilities to be seen as making a positive contribution to wider society (and not merely as a burden), enabled these women to sustain themselves economically and also provided national recognition of this innovative partnership that had been built between disability organizations.

Third, practitioners highlighted that **listening to the voices of vulnerable groups at this time is key**. For example, LCDZ's earlier work to make the voices of women with disabilities an accepted, active part of policy discussions in Zimbabwe bore fruit in this crisis. Practitioners in a range of contexts, however, noted that COVID-19 responses typically heightened the digital divide, leading to the risk of bias in collecting VAWG-related data and providing VAWG prevention services and creating extra barriers for low-literacy groups. Furthermore, a rise in online violence against women, especially those of minority sexual and gender identities was named as a primary concern by one organization, with domestic violence listed as being of secondary importance. Online engagement with minority groups to understand their emerging needs during the COVID-19 pandemic was carried out by RSAT in Thailand and Equality in China. While practitioners noted that this approach to identifying current needs unavoidably prioritizes those with digital access, they also highlighted how groups with intersecting vulnerabilities need to be heard, as they often bear the burden of COVID-19 restrictions:

In late 2020, there was an online survey on women's experience during COVID-19 and we found disabled women, especially sexual and gender minority disabled women, bear the brunt of COVID-19 and encounter different types of violence. The most common violence is verbal, especially the online verbal violence. Because during COVID-19 most people increased their online conversation with other people in some social media, so most perpetrators are strangers, people they don't know, because they are online (FGD, 1 February 2021).

Fourth, COVID-19-related adaptations are being made by VAWG prevention programmes by organizations working with groups with intersecting vulnerabilities **to better understand their emerging needs and the risks and barriers escalating for those most vulnerable and develop strategies to reach vulnerable groups that can fall further behind**. For example, FSIS in Guatemala started home visits to compensate for COVID-19 restrictions on movement. However, underlying these immediate responses is an awareness of increased mental health strain on already vulnerable groups, leading to needs for expanded psychosocial support services. Heightened economic stresses can be compounded for some of the most vulnerable groups. For example, economic realities for self-identified sex workers in Guatemala and Jamaica intersect with pre-

existing patterns of stigma and discrimination, where vulnerable groups may be more at risk, lose their jobs or have to return to abusive homes because of COVID-19, as one organization noted in the FGDs:

COVID-19 has mainly affected their earnings … it has made them much more vulnerable to [violence against women] … street-based sex workers are not able to earn much because of the rigid curfew hours. Decreased or lack of income to care for their families [children and other family members] has pushed many to turn to more risky means of earning an income and/ or increased exposure to and dependency on abusive partners (written reflection (translated), FGD invitee, 1 February 2021).

As a result, practitioners also highlight that donor flexibility is essential at this time to enable grass-roots organizations to adapt to a rapidly changing macroenvironment and a high level of uncertainty. Funding that enables adaptions in the light of COVID-19 was critical to prevent some marginalized groups being left behind, avoid the reversal of prior VAWG prevention gains and enable intersectional responses to emerge.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Projects consistently show that COVID-19 and many social responses to it intersect with pre-existing vulnerabilities to put some women and girls at an even greater risk of violence and to reduce their access to reporting and to necessary VAWG services.

- Projects that take an intersectional approach to COVID-19 and VAWG shine a spotlight on existing intersecting vulnerabilities that have worsened and need engagement to mitigate them. For example, institutionalization, lack of mobility, risky occupations and migrancy intersect in new ways in the light of COVID-19. Practitioners highlight the need to adapt and innovate.

- The digital divide has emerged as an intersection of particular importance under COVID-19 for much VAWG prevention; in many cases, women and girls with intersecting vulnerabilities cannot share their needs, access training, communicate or receive online services, and they may fall further behind. This divide requires VAWG prevention organizations to focus more carefully on how to adapt to COVID-19 realities.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 10 organizations included in this synthesis review showcased various creative ways of doing VAWG prevention using intersectional approaches. The synthesis review has reflected on how these organizations addressed the contextual challenges of the diverse settings where they implemented VAWG prevention programming. It has explored the importance of making visible the unique realities and needs relating to compounded overlapping vulnerabilities that affect the women and girls whom programming focused on. As a result, much has been learned about applying intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention in practice. These conclusions do not repeat the practitioner-specific insights already presented in the key take-away boxes in each section; rather, they focus on key findings that surfaced across the 10 CSOs.

CSOs can play a unique and important role in developing intersectional approaches to working with women and girls for VAWG prevention. Their mandate is often to represent ordinary people and give a voice to marginalized groups made vulnerable to violence in compounded ways by understanding, making visible and representing their interests to wider society, especially to decision-makers. CSOs are often known and trusted in local communities, which is essential for identifying and working with many groups that are most vulnerable to violence. Many of these organizations are well positioned to develop flexible programming and activities that can adapt and evolve in ways that meet project participants' changing needs. A willingness to work collaboratively emerged as a common feature of many of these small organizations, and they had the agility and adaptability to be able to do so in ways that governments, for example, may lack. Their experiences show that, if organizations are given flexible funding opportunities and support to work together, collaborative intersectional approaches can emerge that can strengthen all partner organizations' VAWG prevention efforts.

The organizations that formed the basis of this synthesis review were very diverse, showing that it is **not just one type of organization that can engage in this way**. All 10

are CSOs, but they vary considerably in focus, size and reach, and often they were formed by and for a group identified as having specific intersecting vulnerabilities to experiencing violence. Grass-roots presence, representation and local legitimacy are all advantages when working with women and girls with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence. For example, in Chile, Corporación Humanas formed partnerships with five small organizations that each represented the interests of very different groups of women who were all vulnerable to violence in different ways. As a result of this grass-roots presence and legitimacy, these smaller organizations had wider influence and reach than their size warranted. In reflecting on the different types of CSOs, it becomes clear that women's organizations play an important role in partnering with other organizations to build awareness of and capacity for VAWG prevention for women and girls who are marginalized, stigmatized or made vulnerable.

In the introduction to this synthesis review, a conceptual framework was offered as a tool to aid understanding of how VAWG prevention projects may enter into and evolve in their various journeys with intersectionality. The projects included in this synthesis review all identified a specific group or groups of women and girls (stage 1) that their VAWG prevention programming focused on. They recognized that the groups experienced overlapping vulnerabilities that compounded their risks of experiencing VAWG because of their different, intersecting identities or circumstances. For example, the work of Equality brought attention to the specific vulnerabilities of many different groups of women (LBT women, HIV-positive women, young women and women with disabilities), whereas HelpAge in Moldova identified the specific ways in which older women are at risk of a number of forms of violence.

In stage 1 of intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention, **complex questions emerge when practical decisions have to be made involving tension between having a targeted focus and being inclusive**. A number of the projects included in this synthesis review had specific

experiences where the fact that they had a targeted focus on a specific group of women made vulnerable to violence meant that they could not help another group that their work also identified as vulnerable to violence. For example, HelpAge recognized in its UN Trust Fund-funded project that many older men were vulnerable and at risk of violence in some of the same ways as older women; MDRI-S in Serbia, in assisting women with mental disabilities in institutions, found that men with similar disabilities also experienced abuse; and RSAT in Thailand was challenged in its work with lesbian and transgender women to also engage with transgender men. This tension between having a targeted focus and being inclusive can be used in productive ways to shed light on multiple interconnected risks between groups. An intersectional approach does not demand that VAWG prevention work respond to everything and everyone; in fact, it often accompanies the specific identification of and response to very particular groups. Although this approach recognizes that it is often important to prioritize certain intersections in a particular time and place, it demands that this be done while constantly keeping the bigger and changing picture in mind. It also calls for a constant awareness of the power dynamics involved in responding to a specific group with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence and of the risks of categorizing vulnerability in fixed silos. Organizations navigated this tension in different ways. For example, MDRI-S in Serbia and HelpAge in Moldova could draw on their overall mandates and additional funding to engage with groups excluded from the focus of their UN Trust Fund-funded programming (men with disabilities and older men, respectively).

The intersectional approaches of VAWG prevention projects may remain at stage 1 – identifying a group or groups with intersecting vulnerabilities on which VAWG prevention programming focuses – but some projects choose to have an intersectional approach also guide their understanding of their context, as well as the design and implementation of the programming (stage 2). Projects that engage at stage 2 see the women and girls identified in stage 1 not only as beneficiaries but as co-owners and implementers of programming. This stage was illustrated, for example, by FSIS in Guatemala, whose programme design and specific activities were determined by the needs and priorities of the migrant sex workers (as identified during FGDs) that the organization's

programming focused on, and also by JASL in Jamaica, which had representatives of the groups of women that it focused on conduct training sessions for service providers.
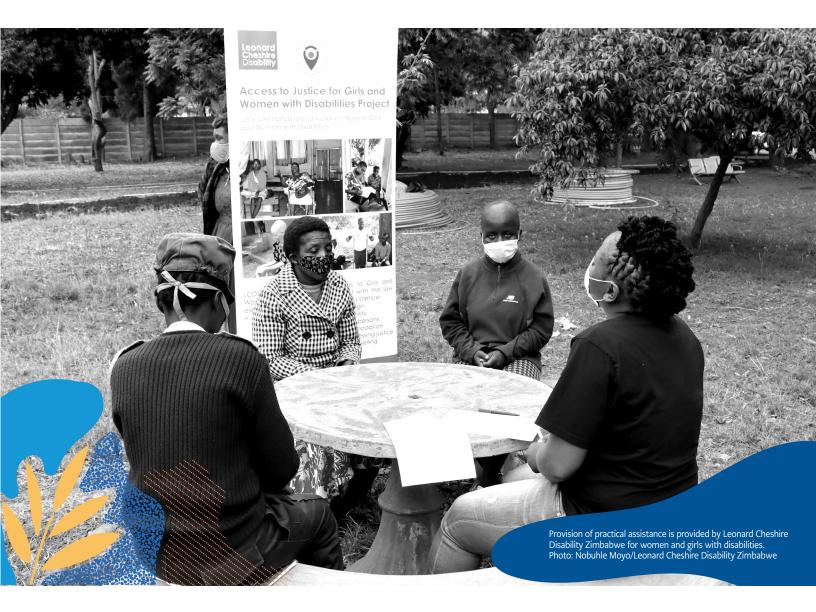
It is possible that an intersectional approach to programme design and implementation may lead organizations to reconsider their targeted focus on a specific group vulnerable to violence, illustrating that movement between stage 1 and stage 2 is not necessarily linear. For example, WCC in Jordan had originally adopted a very narrow focus on out-of-school girls only. However, as the programme progressed, the practitioners were able to see the risks and challenges of focusing only on this group and to open up to the benefits of also engaging with in-school girls. RSAT in Thailand, as another example, had not considered the implications of religious affiliation initially, but, as the project evolved, the practitioners responded to the increased vulnerabilities of lesbian and transgender women identified in Muslim communities. Therefore, the tension between having a targeted focus and inclusivity should be viewed in terms of a continuum along which organizations may legitimately position themselves differently, but with that tension constantly reminding and challenging practitioners to critically reflect on why and how they are choosing to do what they are doing. This constant reflection can lead to a reconsideration, or reformulation, of the focus of intervention programming, as illustrated by the WCC and RSAT projects.

VAWG prevention interventions may choose to proceed to stage 3, in which they focus on the systems and power relations that drive inequalities and vulnerabilities. Fundación Mundubat's project is an example of a project that did this. Its intersectional approach meant that its learning materials highlighted not only vulnerabilities but also the intersectional injustices that the women were exposed to, by analysing oppressions through a feminist lens that focused on patriarchy, racism and classism as root causes that create vulnerability for many women. Intersectional approaches that proceed to stage 3 can reveal and highlight the centrality of power and the importance of VAWG prevention interventions that critically engage with structural power relations. This is a key, essential feature of intersectional approaches, which in itself challenges the VAWG prevention field by **calling for a more comprehensive, multidimensional focus on power**. VAWG perpetration by men should

remain a key focus of VAWG prevention, as it remains a reality that patriarchy is often the main power system that drives much VAWG. At the same time, VAWG prevention work through intersectional approaches also identifies multidimensional abuses of power at individual, community and systemic levels. LCDZ's work with GWWD in Zimbabwe identified a range of power imbalances and abuses at various interconnected levels. For example, while recognizing that in most cases it was men abusing GWWD, project staff also identified female family members and caregivers isolating and abusing those with disabilities, and community systems and legal structures that systematically ignored GWWD and denied them any recognition.

Thirteen recommendations are offered below for the task of engaging with intersecting vulnerabilities for VAWG prevention. These are informed by practitioner insights from the 10 projects and the process of synthesizing these insights. The recommendations target three specific groups: (1) practitioners, (2) donors and policymakers and (3) the ending VAWG research community.

Provision of practical assistance is provided by Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe for women and girls with disabilities.
Photo: Nobuhle Moyo/Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe

3.1. Recommendations for practitioners

Co-produce programming with women living with overlapping vulnerabilities. They need to be part of designing and implementing VAWG prevention programming to make it appropriate, agile and able to reach others. Participation is central to intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention because those with intersecting vulnerabilities are often made invisible, are hard to reach and may distrust those perceived to be "outsiders" working on their behalf. While involving these women in programme implementation was effective in many projects, meaningful participation is not only a strategy. It is a fundamental right. This means taking note of "who holds the power" and may mean appointing representative women as staff, managers and trustees of VAWG-prevention-related organizations.

Start with an analysis of intersecting vulnerabilities to violence in your own context. Before designing programming, conduct an analysis of which intersecting issues emerge for women and girls in your specific context and how these are connected to violence. A human rights lens can be useful here. An intersectional analysis requires not only collecting data about groups with vulnerabilities and VAWG but also ensuring that it is analysed in ways that highlight where these intersections may compound risk of violence. Noticing if certain groups are "missing" from official data, may be an important step. An analysis of intersecting vulnerabilities should be used not only to identify groups to focus on and areas of programming but also to shape project design and delivery to ensure that the project can respond to emerging challenges that intersect with existing vulnerabilities, such as COVID-19.

Address the invisibility of certain women and girls. Women and girls who are made vulnerable to violence in compounded ways are often invisibilized in societies that remain unaware of their specific realities and needs. This is a key challenge for VAWG prevention and requires acknowledgement of the diverse ways in which this invisibility is created and reinforced. Intersecting stigma is a key driver of invisibility, both internally (self-stigmatization) and externally (from family, the community and society). Addressing this is an important programmatic step and involves working at two levels: with women and girls themselves and with social systems. However, increased visibility can also be risky and needs to be done responsibly and in consultation with the women involved. Working to transform the wider social political and legal systems that drive invisibility is important.

Pay attention to multidimensional power relations. Engaging only with women and girls made vulnerable to violence in compounded ways to empower them can imply that they are responsible for changing the marginalization and violence that they experience. It is important to engage with the individuals, groups and systems that make certain women and girls especially invisible, vulnerable and voiceless and to work to transform complex sets of oppressive power relations with many intersections.

Work collaboratively with partners. Partnerships between organizations that each engage with different groups of women who are vulnerable to violence can build an intersectional approach in ways that maximize resources and learning by building synergy and shared agendas. Jointly tackling invisibilization needs collaboration, and this requires time and resources. Avoiding the competitive mindset that can emerge between organizations when there is limited funding is key. These partnerships also help to avoid homogenization between and within diverse groups with different needs. At the same time, power dynamics in these partnerships need attention, as asymmetrical alliances can lead to the downgrading of the priorities of the so-called "minority" partners.

3.2. Recommendations for donors and policymakers

Applying intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention is a collaborative task for multiple stakeholders. Many of the recommendations to practitioners also apply to donors and policymakers. However, the following recommendations emerged as opportunities specifically for donors and policymakers.

Seek out small local specialist organizations. Small local community organizations can be more visible and accessible to women and girls whose identities or circumstances put them at increased risk of violence.

However, excessive project management requirements can mean that larger organizations dominate the field, and funder requirements need to take this into consideration and ensure that small organizations are involved in funding and policy decisions. When intersectionality is conflated with reaching all groups, organizations that represent those with specific needs can unintentionally be pushed to the side in favour of larger conglomerate international organizations, even though they may have a stronger grasp of the complex intersections in their specific context.

Fund collaborative work. VAWG prevention should not be framed as a zero-sum game of limited funds with an ever-lengthening list of new vulnerabilities. An intersectional approach can help donors and policymakers to design and support collaborative work between local CSOs that are already engaging with diverse groups, or that engage at different levels of the system. This offsets some of the challenges of giving very small grants and reduces fragmentation of policies or funding for separate vulnerabilities. It allows all partners to develop intersectional approaches as well as supporting collective organization for greater sector-wide impact of VAWG prevention strategies. Siloed funding pots for single issues must be used with care, as, while they draw attention to important issues, they can reinforce fragmentation in practice.

Allow proper time and funding for adaptive programming. Carrying out analysis and design in intersectional ways requires additional programmatic steps that add time and costs to the process. For example, participation and partnering approaches require the development of trust between different groups. Donors and policymakers need to be realistic about this and allow for meaningful adaptions along the way as a result. If tight donor timelines mean that most decisions have been agreed before projects have received any support to enable them to involve vulnerable groups, the insights of these groups cannot influence programme design and their involvement may become tokenistic in ways that cause resentment.

Capacitate organizations to do intersectional analysis from below. Intersectionality can run the risk of being merely a surface-level buzzword that is not translated into effective practice. Existing practitioners need support to develop contextual intersectional approaches from the grass roots up. Building the capacity of local stakeholders to conduct their analyses in ways that pay attention to how vulnerabilities may intersect is not the same as the imposition of a pre-decided agenda or specific linguistic terms. For example, open calls for funding proposals may encourage practitioners to make a clear case for engaging with the specific intersecting vulnerabilities faced by women and girls in their contexts in a way that pre-defined calls often do not allow.

Pay attention to intersectional power relations in your own systems. Intersectional approaches draw attention to complex power relations. Donors and policymakers need to be intentional about how they handle the power they hold in relation to practitioners and to reflect self-critically. Power relations may remain latent in their processes, for example if they use pre-determined categories of vulnerabilities into which all practitioners must fit their proposals or reports; if they embed bureaucratic forms of inclusion in their own processes, thus merely adding new intersections to an ever-growing list; or if they mainstream gender in such a way that it becomes just a tick-box exercise. This power can become entangled in wider historical North–South colonial patterns. Intersectional approaches must go beyond including left-out groups in the existing development system to raise fundamental questions about that system and its actors and biases.

3.3. Recommendations for the broader ending VAWG research field

Applying intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention is a collaborative task for the entire sector. Many of the recommendations made above may also apply to researchers, who often also play an indirect role in policymakers' decisions. However, the recommendations made below emerged as particularly important if research on ending VAWG is to take intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention.
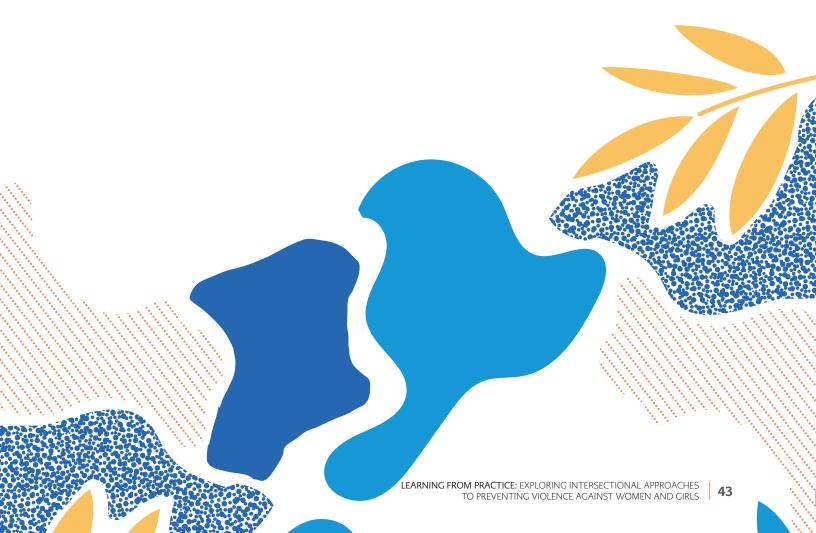
Make perpetration visible. VAWG researchers must avoid focusing only on the vulnerability of women and girls. Without care, this may further invisibilize perpetration and the power relations that often create

and maintain intersecting vulnerabilities to violence. Research that focuses on fixed categories such as one group (e.g. women with disabilities), one form of violence (e.g. intimate partner violence) or one key driver (e.g. patriarchy) is important but can risk reinforcing siloed analysis and interventions. VAWG researchers don't have to do everything, but they do need to pay close attention to power dynamics in the research field and avoid making implicit assumptions. While work has been done by researchers on perpetrators, perpetration and root causes, practitioners still pointed to the need for more support to make this visible in ways that are safe. This suggests that closer collaboration between researchers and practitioners might help in addressing this issue.

Be intentional and accountable in exploring interconnections. Researchers need to be intentional in looking for promising intersections that build synergies and enable connections to be made to intersectional approaches in practice. This includes not approaching issues or using methods in ways that may reinscribe fixed stereotypes of vulnerable groups. VAWG researchers have significant linguistic power with regard to what is made visible and what is prioritized. Self-reflection can enable researchers to engage with their own blind spots and be part of shared accountability mechanisms in the VAWG prevention sector. Working collaboratively to co-create evidence in ways that draw on a range of disciplinary and practical expertise can be part of building these accountable connections.

Engage with complexity. Intersectional approaches highlight the complexity and compounded realities of women's lives that can create heightened vulnerability to violence. Further discussion is needed of the genuine tensions that still exist in VAWG prevention; this could be productive for the whole sector. For example, centralizing the agency and priorities of women seen as particularly vulnerable to violence is important but must not be done in ways that make them solely responsible for changing wider systems of power. Researchers need to resist the temptation to resolve these tensions in theory while practitioners are left grappling with their ongoing complexity.

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