



LEARNING FROM PRACTICE BRIEF SERIES: ISSUE NO. 10

STRENGTHENING A LEGAL AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS LESSONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED BY THE UN TRUST FUND TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Participants of the national survivor workshop and gathering hold thematic group discussions and prepare for presentations. Credit: Marcos Saldana V. Branco / ACbit (Timor-Leste)

Background

Legal and policy reforms and their effective implementation to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) form a core component of strengthening an enabling environment for VAWG prevention. Some promising progress has been seen in many contexts thanks to international laws, political commitments and women's rights activism. However, sudden shifts in legal and policy systems such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic can exacerbate VAWG through new legal and policy restrictions or overburdened formal systems. The elimination of gender-discriminatory laws and the creation of a comprehensive framework of laws and policies that can reach all women and girls are essential. But good laws and policies alone are not enough. Challenges in the effective implementation of these laws and policies by formal duty bearers, the continued power of informal systems and social norms, and a range of practical barriers for women and girls to accessing justice for VAWG also require attention.

The 2019 RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence against Women framework outlines seven interrelated intervention strategies that are critical for VAWG prevention. One of these is strengthening an enabling

environment for prevention. This includes a cluster of relevant legal and policy issues, including tackling gender-discriminatory laws; ensuring the presence, and enforcement, of laws addressing VAWG; and transforming gender-discriminatory attitudes within key government institutions such as the police and health services. The framework highlights that laws that promote gender equality and address VAWG and policies that empower women and girls and respect their rights can reduce underlying risk factors for VAWG and help to protect against VAWG in ways that are essential for a long-term approach to VAWG prevention.

The synthesis review on which this brief is based contributes to discussions around the importance of strengthening legal and policy systems for sustained VAWG prevention by focusing on the key learnings from of a sample of civil society organizations (CSOs) that have been identified as playing roles in (1) reforming laws and policies, (2) supporting their effective implementation by statutory duty bearers, (3) bridging gaps to informal systems and community-level actors and (4) helping to identify and address barriers that limit VAWG survivors' access to justice and as a result disrupting larger cycles of VAWG.

About this brief

This brief provides a short overview of the longer synthesis review which features practice-based knowledge that nine CSOs gained while developing and implementing 10 projects¹ that received funding from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund). All the grantees engaged at the level of legal and/or government policy systems to address VAWG, but they differed in many ways in how they did this, who they engaged with and at what level.

Using selected monitoring and evaluation reports on their projects, a qualitative, inductive approach was taken to explore why and how these CSOs engaged with legal and policy systems. Practice-based insights from the projects were put into conversation with existing literature on VAWG prevention, law and policy reform, law and policy implementation and access to justice to highlight how learning from practice can contribute important lessons to the evidence base on strengthening a legal and policy environment for VAWG prevention. This brief also provides some practical tips and recommendations for practitioners, donors and policymakers, and researchers in the field of ending VAWG.

Case studies

A total of 10 projects or interventions that have been supported by the UN Trust Fund were identified for inclusion in the synthesis review. The projects were implemented by a diverse range of CSOs, including not only non-governmental organizations such as ActionAid in Myanmar, Pragya in India and Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz (ACPP) in El Salvador but also issue-specific organizations focused on intersections that place some women at greater risk, such as Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe (LCDZ) (over two funding cycles) and the Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand (RSAT). Some identified explicitly as women's rights organisations, such as Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) in the State of Palestine and Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice (WIGJ), working across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, the Sudan and Uganda, which was engaging in post-conflict settings, as were Associacaon Chega Ba Ita (ACbit) in Timor-Leste and the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) in Solomon Islands.

All these CSOs engaged at systems level with legal and policy actors as part of VAWG prevention. However, the specific approaches used, the issues emerging, and the

activities implemented to address them were different for each CSO. For example, ACPP in El Salvador partnered with specific government departments and with women's networks to advocate for reforms in VAWG-related laws and policies and for statutory budgetary allocations and to develop a data-driven evidence base and develop the capacities of formal duty bearers. ActionAid in Myanmar, on the other hand, adopted a strategy of providing community-level legal support and human rights education through training informal women paralegals in the community to bridge the gaps it identified between existing VAWG prevention laws and policies and informal justice systems. Its strategy also included equipping women in rural areas to better understand and claim their legal rights.

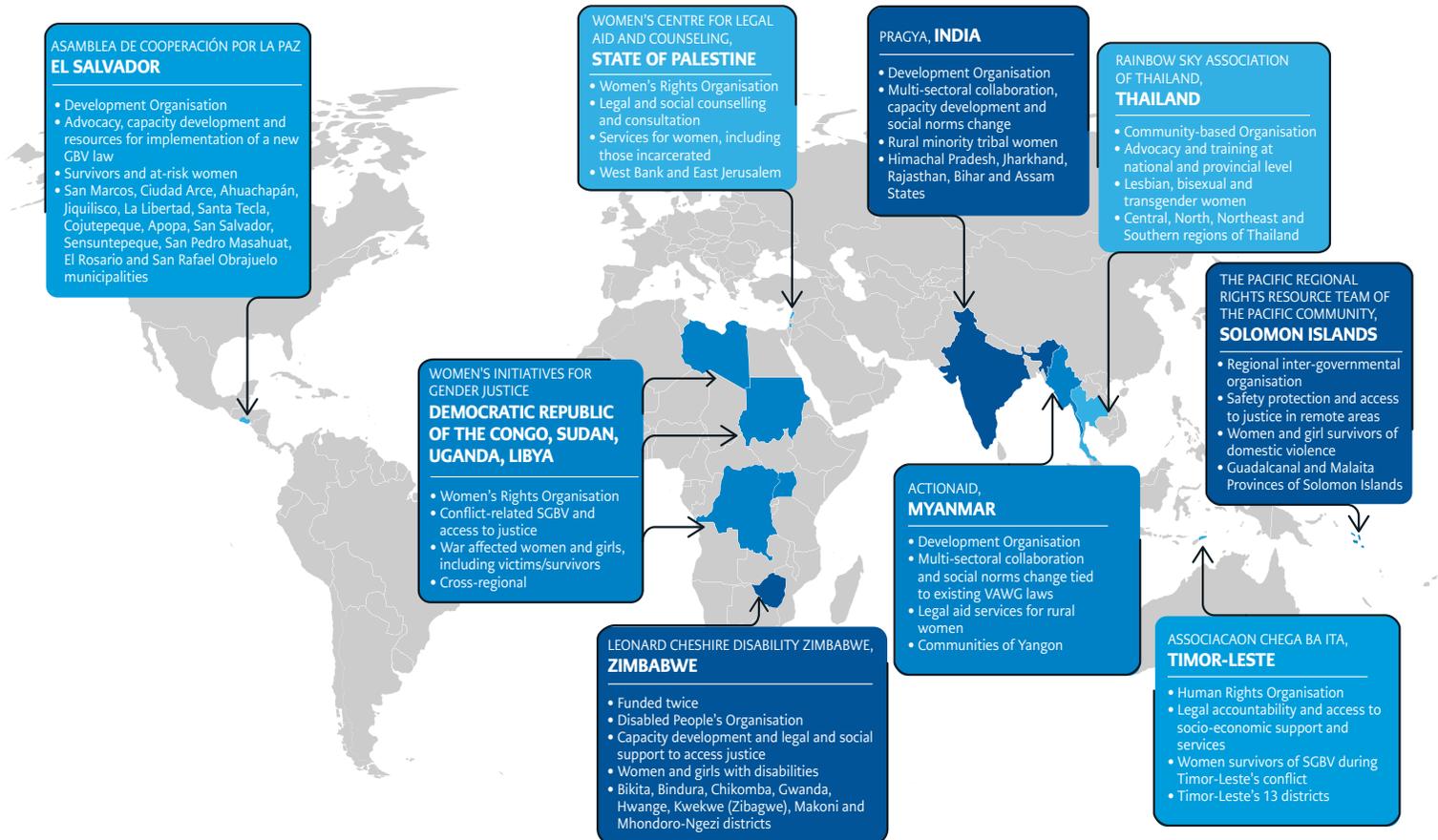
As part of their projects, the nine CSOs also engaged with legal and policy systems at various levels. For example, WIGJ worked at international and cross-regional levels in the context of cases pending before the International Criminal Court to connect survivors to local women's rights networks across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, the Sudan and Uganda. On the other hand, Pragya in India focused on indigenous women in remote regions of the country and how existing national systems could be better implemented in local village contexts.

Although all of the projects focused on engaging with legal and policy systems, they prioritized different points within those systems and engaged in different activities depending on their context. Some grantees focused on advocating for legal and/or policy reforms while others worked to make existing laws more effective by capacitating formal duty bearers within the health, social services and law enforcement systems. Some grantees operated in post-conflict or transitional justice settings to help VAWG survivors to access justice and to ensure that systems to hold perpetrators accountable were put in place in the longer term. For example, ACbit in Timor-Leste focused on collecting and publicizing survivors' stories to put pressure on the government to set up a national reparations fund while also providing psychosocial support to survivors in the interim, owing to limited State capacity.

All the CSOs collaborated with multiple stakeholders across various sectors, seeking to ensure that laws and policies around VAWG prevention were developed and implemented more effectively. However, some CSOs focused specific attention on convening and capacitating inter-agency teams to enable coordinated, proactive VAWG prevention responses by formal duty bearers and CSOs.

¹ One grantee, Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe, received two rounds of funding from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and was able to implement two consecutive projects.

FIGURE 1:
The 9 UN Trust Fund projects included in this brief



What can we learn from diverse civil society organizations about their roles in law and policy reform and implementation?

1. The roles of CSOs in advocacy and evidence-building for legal/policy reform

Because CSOs are rarely in a position to make laws or policy directly, advocacy has emerged as a major area of focus for law and policy reforms. The CSOs included in this brief identified four advocacy-related strategies: (1) community-driven advocacy; (2) advocacy around resourcing; (3) advocacy around leaving no one behind; and (4) advocacy through building an evidence base. Most of the CSOs used some combination of these strategies, and all encountered various challenges.

First, community-driven advocacy for law and policy reform was seen as a unique CSO contribution, especially around gaps or loopholes in existing systems. The CSOs listened to women's concerns and then convened multiple diverse stakeholders for a shared advocacy approach. For example, ActionAid in Myanmar adopted a people-led approach to legal reform and policy advocacy that shapes what it advocates for and helps women's voices to be heard by policymakers:

In designing our strategy when we try to do this legal reform or policy advocacy, it is very much a people-led or community-centred approach. That means we first try to make the community aware of the existing policies and laws to understand [them] and then once people understand, it's much easier to find what the gaps are and what should be next (focus group discussion (FGD), 22 November 2021).

Second, advocacy through evidence-building and data collection was carried out by some CSOs to build the case for changes to laws and policies, especially when limited reliable data were centrally available. For example, Pragya in India and ACPP in El Salvador developed VAWG observatories as centralized data collection repositories on a province-by-province basis; these were regularly updated collaboratively and assisted with ongoing monitoring of state policies to ensure that they were in line with new VAWG laws.

Third, advocacy for adequate statutory human and financial resourcing for the implementation of VAWG prevention laws and policies was another important area of CSO engagement. For example, ACPP in El Salvador worked with women's rights organizations to act collectively to put pressure on the political system from the outside, as well as working with women parliamentarians inside the political system. By doing so, it secured important gains in gender-responsive budgeting tied to new VAWG prevention laws and government policies.

Fourth, some CSOs focused their attention on advocacy with and for specific marginalized groups that had been identified as having been left out of current VAWG prevention laws and policies. They worked to include these voices in participatory policymaking and legal reforms. For example, RSAT in Thailand focused on equipping lesbian, bisexual and trans women to be public advocates in legal and policy spaces. LCDZ in Zimbabwe focused on the needs of girls and women with disabilities and their heightened risk of sexual violence, the lack of standardized protocols regarding them and their right to participate in policy consultations that concern them.

The CSOs also identified a number of challenges in the area of law and policy reform. These included the risk of CSO politicization, cross-departmental power plays within government and justice systems, unintended negative consequences of wider policy shifts at community level, and the reality that this type of work is inevitably slow and long term and requires extensive multisectoral collaboration.

2. Developing the capacity of judicial, law enforcement and government institutions

Many of the CSOs in the sample played roles in developing the capacities of judicial, law enforcement and government institutions. They stressed the importance of multisectoral partnerships for this work, and three approaches to preventing

and responding to VAWG emerged: (1) positive collaboration with government ministries, (2) capacitating law enforcement personnel and (3) strengthening the formal judicial system. Some overall challenges were also highlighted by the CSOs.

First, that CSOs are leading on initiatives that result in positive collaboration with various government ministries by providing them with support to achieve existing priorities, that can accelerate action on law and policy reform. For example, Pragya in India developed inter-agency task teams led by government and CSO stakeholders on a rotating basis. It used the lens of holistic development across various sectors to offer a “benefits-based approach” to different government ministries, building on their existing priorities and budgets, to show how VAWG was related to those and to assist them in finding resources within their existing budgets. Pragya noted that collaboration with ministries is more effective if CSOs can explain how the initiative can help the government achieve existing priorities.

Second, insights emerged from CSOs in the sample that were developing the institutional capacity of law enforcement personnel, such as the police force, to take a more survivor-centred approach to their work and to be better equipped to handle challenges and to enforce new laws in appropriate ways. For example, LCDZ in Zimbabwe taught police officers sign language so that they could communicate directly with girls and women with disabilities who wanted to report violence. This positive contribution by LCDZ built the police's trust and as a result it was invited to review other police protocols. This role was seen as particularly important in contexts where VAWG was seen through the lens of a security framework, as in El Salvador or where the police themselves experience high levels of unaddressed trauma. Failing to build police engagement led to challenges in other aspects of programming, as was experienced by RRRT in Solomon Islands, where the police refused to enforce interim protection orders.

Third, some CSOs focused on developing the capacity of the formal judicial system and its actors around preventing and responding to VAWG. This included equipping youth clinics in Myanmar with tools to treat survivors of VAWG and working with magistrates' courts in both Zimbabwe and El Salvador. For example, WCLAC in the State of Palestine equipped young, newly trained women Sharia lawyers with the necessary skills to provide legal aid within their organizations to survivors of VAWG. All these CSOs noted the need for sensitivity in these partnerships with judicial systems to be able to build trust.

A multi-sector approach strengthened our partnerships and helped us get into government ministries, especially the judicial system, as they are very closed, they don't want people to penetrate their space. So the partnership we had was able to capacitate different judiciary staff members on how to handle girls and women disability survivors – but they don't easily accept other organizations' need to come in and train them (FGD, 23 November 2021).

A number of challenges also surfaced, including the reluctance of some formal duty bearers to publicize their responsibilities and services in this area, the expectations of some governments that the CSOs must report to them, the high turnover of senior officials and the reality that only a small fraction of VAWG issues are ever reported to formal systems. However, the CSOs managed these challenges by taking collaborative inter-agency approaches and sharing responsibilities. **The FGDs also showed that the CSOs were helping stakeholders to shift from taking a reactive approach to adopting a proactive, preventative approach and to connect access to justice and prevention; ensuring that the justice system is accessible and accountable to women is a critical part of disrupting ongoing cycles of VAWG perpetration.**

3. Bridging gaps between formal and informal systems at community level

The CSOs in the sample shared their insights into four interrelated ways in which they bridged gaps between formal and informal systems at community level around accessing laws and policies related to preventing and responding to VAWG: (1) providing community-based legal and policy services directly to women, (2) training community-based volunteer paralegals or rights mentors, (3) working to capacitate informal justice systems or actors to be more survivor centred and (4) carrying out community-level awareness campaigns on rights. They also explained some of the challenges that they had encountered.

First, some CSOs set up and provided direct community-based legal aid services to fill specific gaps in their contexts and to recognize and refer women to available formal services. For example, in India, Pragya set up community-level socioempowerment kiosks, staffed by community volunteers who were trained and equipped by Pragya with a range of basic legal information and advice. One of their key roles was around VAWG prevention, but they also provided other services. This reduced the stigma for women around approaching the kiosks and gained wider support for their presence. Each of these socioempowerment kiosks hosted a free helpline for women connected into and a mentor-based referral network including 150 agencies, such as shelters, counsellors and women's organizations.



Second, some CSOs in the sample trained mobile community-based volunteer paralegals or rights mentors to assist women. For example, ActionAid in Myanmar used a combination of volunteer female paralegals and male role models in rural areas to help bridge the gap it had identified between formal legal systems and women's lives and to provide sustainable community-level support. The organization saw this as a very important investment, as the paralegals became a first point of contact that women felt comfortable with, and the women felt supported because somebody was on their side and understood their situation, while male role models held power and influence with other men

Third, some CSOs worked intentionally to identify and capacitate existing informal justice systems and/or actors around VAWG prevention to make them more survivor centred. For example, in Solomon Islands RRRT trained traditional lay justices who had been granted some power in rural areas around interim protection orders. However, many of these existing systems were seen to be patriarchal and male dominated. RRRT therefore paired lay justices with project-trained volunteer female community facilitators to try to create momentum for reform of the underlying processes.

Fourth, many of the CSOs in the sample carried out community-level awareness campaigns on women's rights to educate women and to discuss social norms at community level that contradict international commitments. For example, WCLAC in the State of Palestine set up community discussions on taboo topics including harmful gender stereotypes around the traditional roles of women in society that restrict their social and educational opportunities. LCDZ engaged with community leaders to raise their awareness of the risks of informal means of redress and how they can perpetuate VAWG:

We engaged community leaders so that they would also make commitments on how they can also prevent violence against girls and women with disabilities within their communities. ... they vowed that they will not preside over cases involving girls and disabilities, because we noticed that ... in the end they will marry them off to the person who abused or rape[d] them because in some cases the families would be saying, "Who will marry this girl with a disability?" So, if someone abuses them, instead of taking formal redress they will use informal redress to address the issue and marry off the girl to that perpetrator (FGD, 22 November 2021).

The CSOs also encountered a range of challenges in this area. These included the patriarchal realities of many informal justice systems and the risks of backlash and resistance from, for example, faith-based and traditional leaders. **However, the CSOs insisted that informal justice systems and social norms must be engaged with and better integrated into formal systems, as they have a strong impact on women's lives.**

4. CSOs' roles in accessing justice for survivors of VAWG and mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable

This section explores roles played by CSOs in the sample that were working in transitional justice spaces, as well as some wider barriers encountered at individual, social and structural levels by VAWG survivors in accessing justice. These CSOs played important roles in (1) addressing individual barriers for women by connecting VAWG prevention and access to justice as a cycle; (2) working at structural levels to promote legal and policy accountability around access to justice for VAWG survivors, especially in transitional justice spaces; and (3) helping to shape a more holistic understanding of justice among key stakeholders.

First, insights from the sample showed that CSOs are well positioned to identify a range of individual practical barriers that VAWG survivors may face when seeking access to justice. If these are not addressed, all the other work on improving laws, policies and formal systems may be wasted. Although the responsibility for addressing these barriers ultimately lies with the State, CSOs often play critical supporting roles, especially in fragile or conflict-affected settings, in positioning access to justice and prevention as a cycle. CSOs noted the risks of women turning to informal justice systems if these barriers are not addressed, as well as the vicious cycle of VAWG that results if access to justice is not forthcoming. For example, LCDZ notes that women with disabilities face unique communication and transport barriers.

Second, CSOs in the sample played important roles in helping to dismantle structural barriers that can limit access to justice, especially in conflict-affected, transitional justice or fragile contexts where formal systems may have partially collapsed. This helps to hold wider legal and government systems to account by drawing attention to invisibilized VAWG issues. For example, ACbit's work in the post-conflict context of Timor-Leste to collect and publicize the stories of hundreds of VAWG survivors as part of

the transitional justice process put effective pressure on the government to establish a survivor reparations fund while also providing practical support to fill gaps in current formal service provision and to break intergenerational cycles of VAWG.

Due to the lack of institutional support at national level and the restricted number of facilities providing counselling in the country, the community-based psychosocial support offered by ACbit's trauma healing activities fills a huge gap in health service delivery and is much needed by the country's traumatized population, especially victims of sexual abuse, and if uncared for, [this] can lead to intergenerational cycles of trauma affecting future generations (ACbit, final report, p. 42).

Third, the CSOs, especially those operating in fragile contexts, raise wider questions about what justice really looks like in relation to VAWG. They insist on a holistic understanding of justice that goes beyond a criminal perspective alone to include restorative and reparative aspects for women. They also highlight the importance of connections between individual- and systems-level work in generating new laws and breaking intergenerational cycles of VAWG through seeing justice as incorporating psychosocial, health and financial support for survivors and their children. WIGJ saw these connections and complexities in its cross-regional work and the synergies that came from working at multiple levels simultaneously.

Finally, CSOs in the sample also identified challenges in two specific areas. The first was in managing tensions between their work to meet individual survivors' needs for immediate justice and their work to advance law and policy changes at systems level for future generations. A multi-pronged approach was recommended here. For example, WIGJ provided assistance to VAWG survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in combination with wider advocacy work and a strategy that detailed other actors' responsibilities and monitored their progress. The second challenge was that militia and State organs themselves can be institutionally complicit in or perpetrators of VAWG. As a result, these players may not always be safe avenues for women to seek access to justice.

5. Law and policy reform and implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic

Only a few of the nine CSOs in the sample had VAWG prevention work funded by the UN Trust Fund under way in 2020. LCDZ received funds through a second UN Trust Fund COVID-19-related grant. **However, many of the CSOs reflected on how their VAWG prevention work had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.** These included (1) challenges relating to overwhelmed and/or stalled government and legal systems, (2) challenges relating to implementation of programmes and (3) new opportunities for CSOs as a result of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic created additional immediate challenges for CSOs working to strengthen legal and policy systems. Many formal duty bearers in legal and policy systems were overwhelmed with new COVID-19 requirements, and CSOs noted that VAWG often increased. For example, in Solomon Islands the majority of government staff were sent home to rural areas, making planned CSO collaborations impossible and further overwhelming the law courts that RRRT were trying to work with. In India, Pragya also experienced this overload:

Because managing COVID-19 called upon health workers and police as front-line workers, they were not able to cater to other needs of the community; they were completely engaged in that and didn't have capacity to deal with anything more (FGD, 22 November 2021).

A number of CSOs were able to act as a nexus bridging the gaps between government laws and policies and the implications for women and girls in communities, by offering an early warning system that provided timely feedback on the impact of new policies. For example, Pragya in India was able to highlight the risks of compulsory school closure policies for girls, in terms of both families prioritizing boys' access to limited digital technology and the increased risk of child marriage.

Some CSOs encountered new opportunities and were able to put their pre-existing collaborative engagement with legal and policy systems to good use at this time. For example, LCDZ lobbied effectively for VAWG prevention to be seen as an "essential service" and for local courts to continue to handle VAWG cases. It also utilized its relationship of trust with the police to access travel permits allowing VAWG survivors to attend court and helped to ensure that the voices of women and girls with disabilities were heard at the policymaking table with regard to COVID-19 national plans and VAWG.



Something positive happened – it [COVID-19] also strengthened our organization. COVID-19 hit us unexpectedly, and our organization did not have the capacity to handle a disaster or [know] how to continue implementing SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence] work during a disaster. Through funding from the UN Trust Fund, we were able to review our disaster risk reduction plans so that they were all-encompassing – including how to end VAW [violence against women] during a disaster. So that was a positive. It's also changed the way we usually work because for us it was [before] more like community awareness in remote areas. But with COVID-19 coming, we're now using radio programmes. They reach more people and help do community awareness[-raising] in a particular area. So our numbers increased in terms of who can now access information about our services (FGD, 23 November 2021).

CSOs' responses in the context of COVID-19 highlighted the importance of having collaborative relationships and building trust with wider government and legal systems on which they could draw in times of crisis. This enabled some CSOs to contribute to wider national emergency planning and responses in ways that intentionally considered the need for VAWG prevention. However, the declaration of states of emergency by governments also had worrying implications in some places. Furthermore, the misuse of increased government powers at this time remained a concern for some CSOs and could contribute to the extension of government control over CSOs.

Conclusions

A number of overarching insights emerged from those shared by the nine CSOs in the sample who worked on law and policy reform and implementation. First, their projects showcase **the value of the advocacy roles that CSOs often play** through community-driven collaborative action and evidence-building for law and policy reforms. Second, CSOs also play crucial roles in **developing the capacity of formal duty bearers and institutions** in ways that enhance their ability to provide their services behind the scenes, which is not always easy to measure, and they are challenging the divide between formal and informal systems of justice by paying attention to women's experiences of all these systems. Third, CSOs **were identified as ideally placed to help bridge gaps between formal and informal systems** of justice and prevention at community level and to raise awareness of the legal rights and responsibilities of both men and women. Fourth, CSOs play a range of roles in **identifying and helping to address barriers to accessing justice** for survivors and systems holding perpetrators and States accountable. All of this highlights the importance of State and non-State actors working together to prevent VAWG, promote access to justice and provide mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable. Finally, **unexpected external events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts or emergencies, can overwhelm government and legal systems and reshape their priorities.** CSOs with pre-existing relationships with these systems can play a critical role at these times, if they are supported to do so, ensuring that attention is paid to how these events may affect systems of VAWG prevention and justice, as well as whose voices contribute to new policies. CSOs can act as an early warning system for the impact of law and policy changes on women.



Beneficiaries identifying most significant change stories at Lessons Learning workshop in Lakhimpur district, Assam. Credit: Pinak Protim Baruah / Pragma (India)

Recommendations

Recommendations for practitioners

1. **Careful positioning is needed in relation to CSOs' engagement with legal and policy systems.** CSOs must consider whether to work alone or to partner with others for a collaborative approach and decide what levels and entry points in these systems have most impact in their specific context to leverage existing systems, rather than creating a parallel approach.
2. **CSOs must avoid politicization** by carefully balancing the political task of advocacy for systems-level VAWG prevention in civil society with the risks of becoming politicized by party politics in their specific context. Working with other CSOs to build a shared advocacy agenda can prevent the over-exposure of one CSO, especially if the government is hostile to women's rights.
3. **Capacitating formal government and legal duty bearers for improved VAWG prevention can strengthen the entire system.** Collaborating in multisectoral partnerships is essential but can involve managing complex power dynamics. Collaborative work ensures that CSOs' contributions have an impact on existing duty-bearing systems and hold them accountable.
4. **Look for ways to bridge gaps between formal and informal systems and actors around laws and policies and to make them more survivor centred and connected.** Consider working to transform social norms and equip women at community level to understand and demand their rights as an essential part of the effective implementation of VAWG laws and policies.
5. **Disrupting cycles of VAWG requires integrating access to justice with VAWG prevention strategies in the long term.** When VAWG survivors can access multidimensional justice, including healing and support, this prevents the worsening of consequences or the recurrence of violence, and it strengthens the accountability of perpetrators and duty bearers. This is especially critical in settings of transitional justice where state and legal systems may have partially collapsed and need support to rebuild.
6. **CSOs can become a wider resource for legal and political systems in times of crisis.** Unexpected external factors can have implications for laws and policies related to VAWG prevention and put pressure on the capacity and attention of legal and government systems. CSOs can leverage their existing relationships and filter their expertise into new policies and laws to help prevent VAWG from escalating.

Recommendations for donors and policymakers

1. **Provide long-term, flexible funding for law and policy reform and implementation, which take time, require trusting relationships and are frequently affected by external factors.** Such factors may mean that gains are reversed. Donors need to think about how to support this type of work and consider collaborative platforms to ensure a shared long-term agenda.
2. **Support CSOs to navigate complex power relations sensitively with formal and/or informal government and legal systems stakeholders, who are often highly politicized.** Using a particular donor-driven programmatic framework or receiving visible foreign funding can place a CSO at risk. Working at this level is also about enabling changes in mindset and behaviour to filter into systems of wider power.
3. **Develop creative, flexible ways to measure systems-level impact.** Monitoring and evaluation systems need to capture CSOs' work on influencing and catalysing changes in systems as well as convening and capacitating other organizations. Typical programmatic markers of causality, impact and success may not apply. Measuring progress at individual beneficiary level only is unlikely to capture systems-level change or the impact of laws and policies on the next generation.

Recommendations for researchers in the field of ending VAWG

1. **Take an intersectional approach to researching law and policy reform and implementation.** This helps avoid research silos and explore intersecting issues within diverse women's lived realities of complexity. It also allows more of a focus on how informal and formal legal and policy systems and actors may intersect to shape the VAWG prevention landscape in new ways.
2. **Collaborate as researchers to build sector-wide and multisectoral patterns of evidence, including CSOs' sector-wide learning.** An interdisciplinary approach can engage with underlying power relations with, and between, these various systems, including mapping and making visible the wider trends seen in civil society, especially around VAWG prevention.
3. **Document longer-term patterns of systems change.** Researchers should look more carefully and longitudinally at what works and does not work longer term to influence complex systems, the indirect, catalysing roles that CSOs may play in these, and the evidence base in this area.

4. **Use more creative and participatory action research methodologies** that acknowledge the political context of VAWG prevention work at systems level and surface the messy dilemmas involved in changing and implementing policies and laws in various contexts, and showcase the lived realities of the women and girls affected and empower them as research subjects.
5. **Consider specific policymaking audiences and generate tailored research outputs** that help make researchers' work accessible and relevant to government and legal policymakers, donors and practitioners, and not only to the research community. This will enable increased uptake of findings in accessible formats that reflect the realities that policymakers encounter.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This brief is authored by Selina Palm and is part of a series of briefs produced by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. For the longer synthesis review on which this brief is based, and others in the series, see the [UN Trust Fund Learning Hub](#).

Visit the [UN Trust Fund evaluation library](#) for access to over 100 final external evaluations of projects supported by the UN Trust Fund, including most of those mentioned in this brief. The library is searchable by country and theme.

For more information or to give feedback on this product, please contact the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women at untf-evaw@unwomen.org.

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[ActionAid from Myanmar](#), [Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz from El Salvador](#), [Associação Chega Ba Ita from Timor-Leste](#), [Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe](#), [Pragya from India](#), the [Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand from Thailand](#), the [Regional Rights Resource Team of the Pacific Community from Solomon Islands](#), the [Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling from the State of Palestine](#), [Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice from across the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), [Libya](#), the [Sudan](#) and [Uganda](#).

About the UN Trust Fund: 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 \$198 million to 609 initiatives in 140 countries and territories.



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