SYNTHESIS REVIEW SERIES: SPECIAL EDITION #2

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE:

FINAL SYNTHESIS REVIEW OF THE PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE ON THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Lessons from civil society organizations funded by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

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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 grantmaking mechanism dedicated to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). 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 $215 million to 646 initiatives in 140 countries and territories. In 2022, the UN Trust Fund managed a grants portfolio of 186 projects aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women and girls in 70 countries and territories across five regions, with grants totaling $87 million. Grant recipients are primarily civil society organizations (CSOs). Since 2018 (cycle 20), the UN Trust Fund has been funding only CSO projects. In 2022, the majority (62 per cent) of these CSOs were women's rights organizations.

About the Learning from Practice series on prevention

In this series on prevention, the UN Trust Fund prioritized 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 organization 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 and final external evaluation reports. 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" 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.

Pathways to 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. Survivor-centred, multisectoral service provision
10. Strengthening a legal and policy environment

Special Edition #1 The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the prevention of violence against women and girls

Each pathway has been analyzed and their corresponding synthesis co-created by a researcher and up to ten grantees per pathway. The work of these grantees generated significant practice-based insights on the particular theme and offered contextual and embedded best practices, challenges and useful tools on the topic that emerged from iterative learning from practice. The intended audience for the synthesis reviews is threefold: (i) practitioners, (ii) donors and grant-makers and (iii) researchers, all working in the area of VAWG prevention.

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Legal counselling to women at risk of violence.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CF	Community Facilitators
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CAG	Core Advisory Group
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
GBV	Gender-based violence
LAC	Latin American Countries
LBTQI+	Lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, queers, and intersex
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
PBK	Practice-Based Knowledge
SVRI	Sexual Violence Research Institute
UN Trust Fund	United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WGWD	Women and girls with disabilities
WRO	Women's Rights Organizations

Courtesy of Badabon Sangho.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

For over 25 years, the UN Trust Fund has been supporting civil society organizations, especially women's rights organizations across the globe in order to prevent and end violence against women and girls (VAWG). Over the decades, the UN Trust Fund has built a substantial archive and informal community of practice dedicated to eradicating VAWG. Realising the potential wealth of learning contained within this community, the UN Trust Fund has also invested considerable effort over the past 10 years in supporting the development of both its own and grantees' monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity.

The potential of the UN Trust Fund's archive of knowledge is increasingly being recognized by internal and external partners. A Mid Term Review (2018) of the previous Strategic Plan (2015-2020) concluded that the UN Trust Fund had huge potential to fill gaps in the ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) evidence base and to inform UN system inter-agency work more systematically on VAWG through this knowledge. A meta-analysis (2020) of high-quality evaluations found that "...UN Trust Fund projects, by virtue of the demand-driven and competitive nature of grant-making, constitute a unique dataset representing a diversity of civil society programmes working to end VAWG, both for those interested in advancing knowledge in the field of EVAWG and for practitioners to learn from other hands-on experience". With the UN Trust Fund's new Strategic Plan (2021-2025), the commitment to document and harvest knowledge produced by civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) in a collaborative and inclusive manner was further solidified.

Project beneficiaries who have been enrolled in schools in Djouzami

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1.2 Purpose and Objectives

As part of its commitment to elevating practice-based knowledge (PBK),[1] the UN Trust Fund over the past three years (2020-2022) has co-created with nearly 100 grantees a series of knowledge products on prevention called, "Learning from Practice: Lessons on Preventing violence from civil society organizations funded by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women". This series is intended to highlight practice-based insights from CSOs as highly valuable and important to planning, designing, and funding interventions and research in VAWG prevention. It also aims to highlight the unique role of civil society organizations, particularly women's rights organizations, in preventing violence against women and girls. Furthermore, it seeks to promote practice-based knowledge as a key resource and complementary knowledge base for existing research in the field of VAWG to improve the effectiveness of programming, funding, and policy as well as supplement impact data with process data. Practically, donors, practitioners and researchers should be able to utilize the knowledge and lessons across this series to inform design of EVAWG interventions by adapting approaches to their culture and context, as well as reflecting critically on the limitations and challenges identified in the practice-based learning of UN Trust Fund grantees.

This Final Synthesis Review provides a set of extracted, highly summarized findings across the ten identified pathways to preventing VAWG. It aims to draw key lessons from all ten briefs in the Prevention Series plus the Special Edition on COVID-19 in one place, along with recommendations and feedback on the series.[2] In essence, this final synthesis review has three distinct objectives and the remainder of the review is divided into the following threer sections as well:

1. **Methodology:** Capture the extensive and iterative qualitative methodology and process of co-creating and documenting practice-based knowledge over the past three years – demonstrating that the process of gathering these insights is as critical as its outcome.
2. **Lessons Learnt:** Consolidate the lessons across the ten key pathways to prevention
3. **Recommendations:** Openly reflect on the contribution of practice-based knowledge to the body of evidence on VAWG prevention, its application and uptake.

1 The UN Trust Fund draws inspiration from Raising Voices (2019) definition of practice-based learning as "the cumulative knowledge acquired from designing and implementing ideas and methodologies over a sustained timeframe, including insights gained from observation, direct experiences, and program monitoring".

2 This paper does not offer the complete set of CSO/WRO examples and recommendations across each thematic in the Series, but rather introduces concepts, frameworks, and practitioner-based insights with some illustrative examples. Please refer to the relevant brief for more information on each theme/pathway toward prevention; all briefs can be accessed here: untf.unwomen.org/en/learning-hub/prevention-series

2. METHODOLOGY

In its Strategic Plan (2021-2025), the UN Trust Fund has committed to systematically extract lessons from its archive of monitoring and evaluation reports in order to inform the field of VAWG prevention and response, and inform its own grantmaking priorities. In order to reach this milestone, the UN Trust Fund engaged in a three-year process of harvesting, documenting, co-producing and disseminating knowledge on VAWG prevention, and the methodology can be broadly divided into the three phases: (1) identification of themes (2) thematic deep dives; and (3) dissemination, uptake, and reflection on the ten key pathways to prevention. A key principle of every stage - with EVAW practitioners and researchers.

PHASE 1

The identification of ten key pathways to prevention

In order to begin distilling lessons from its archive in collaboration with grantees and produce a body of practice-based knowledge on VAWG prevention, as a first step, a Core Advisory Group (CAG) was formed. The CAG comprising CSOs/former grantees, donors and researchers was set up in early 2020 in order to inform the strategic direction, key priorities, methodology of co-production with civil society organizations, dissemination and uptake. From August 2020 through October 2020, a rapid review[3] of the archives was commissioned with the following primary research question: what are the key practitioner-based lessons that can be drawn from the UN Trust Fund's knowledge base on prevention of VAWG, across one or more key thematic areas? The objective of Phase 1 is therefore to engage with the breadth of the UN Trust Fund's archives, in order to ensure that the thematic deep dives (of Phase 2) are determined by and relevant to the praxis of grantees' projects.

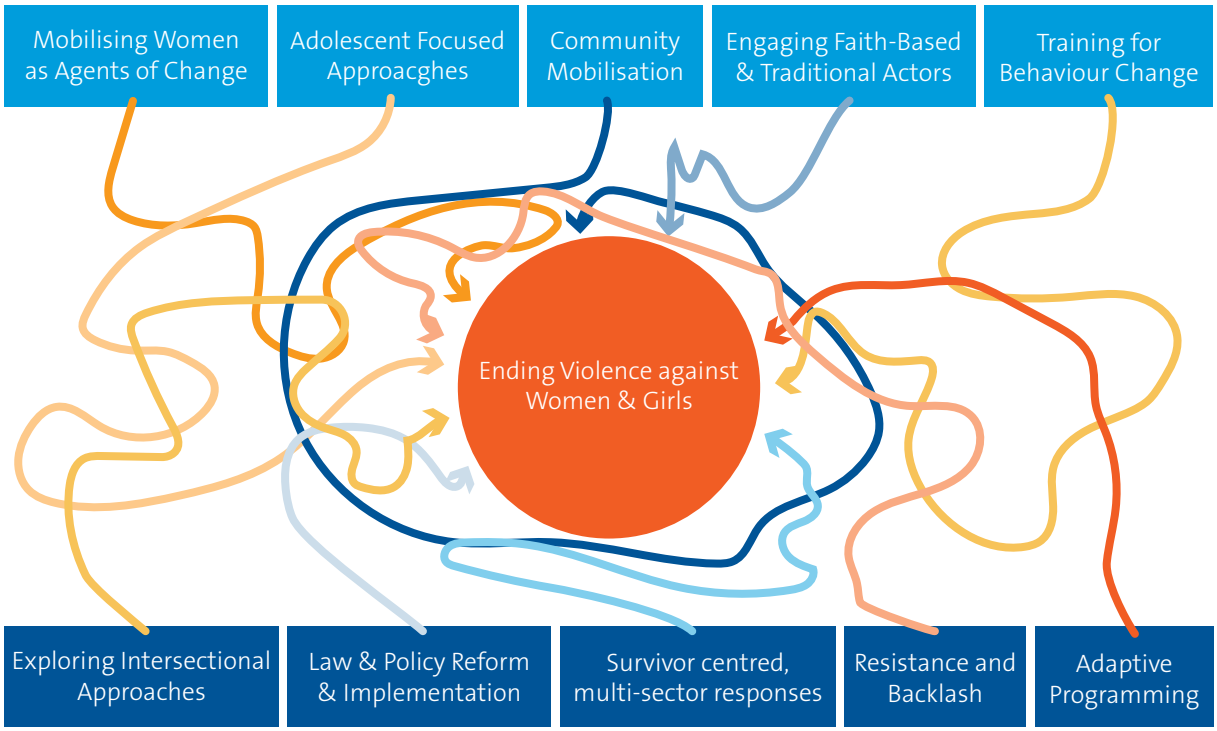
An inductive, thematic approach was used to surface the documented experiences of projects that offer nuanced breadth and depth on issues emerging from diverse contexts. Eighty-nine project grants were selected, all of which were civil society organization (CSO) projects from the UN Trust Fund's grantee pool and their final progress reports (written by grantees) and final evaluation reports (written by external evaluators commissioned by grantees) were coded in Atlas.ti8 and synthesized to ensure that the practice-based learning from the UN Trust Fund database itself plays a central role in determining the recommended focus of the various themes explored. There were four inclusion criteria for selecting Phase 1:

- Projects that closed in the last Strategic Plan period of 2015-2020
- Projects whose evaluation reports were rated high quality by an independent meta-evaluation
- Projects whose monitoring reports were rated high performance by the UN Trust Fund's internal performance monitoring
- Projects invited for a second round of funding by the UN Trust Fund

3 This report was co-authored by Dr Elisabet Le Roux and Dr Selina Palm. The longer report is available upon request.

Cross-cutting lessons emerging inductively from the qualitative data analysis were triangulated with a rapid literature review (an overview of the state of evidence on what works to end VAWG) to identify key themes. Initially, 20 themes were identified, of which 10 were selected and framed with a set of questions for further exploration and consultation directly with CSOs/WROs. The ten Pathways towards Prevention identified through the PBK synthesis process were the ones on which the most PBK emerged from the Final Report and External Evaluation sections reviewed. The ten themes/pathways to prevention were as follows:

FIGURE 1: Pathways to Prevention



Source: Le Roux and Palm (2020), "Learning by Doing: Synthesis Review of Practice-Based Knowledge on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls", UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, October 2020

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

3. **Exploring intersecting approaches:** A number of intersecting identity variables combine to place some women at increased risk, such as: living with HIV, being pregnant, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning, intersex (LBTQI+); being migrants, who are displaced and living with a disability. As a result, there is much to learn from projects that intentionally engaged with women at increased risk because of their intersectional identities. How did they navigate the different challenges of different identities, and the different sources of resistance to different identities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These thematics were validated via global consultations with 250+ UN Trust Fund grantees/EVAW practitioners, as well as the CAG. These early consultations with grantees for "Elevating Practitioner-Based Knowledge on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls" helped discuss these prevention themes and acted as a collaborative space to discuss which themes most resonated with the grantees and their work. These insights also informed the content and helped reshape the questions asked under each thematic deep dive of the knowledge briefs. Grantees also provided extensive feedback regarding crucial themes such as deconstruction of gender prejudices and stereotypes, inclusion of girls and women living with disabilities (GWWD), and inclusion of COVID-19 related risks, all of which were incorporated and addressed in the next phase of the work. The notion of undoing harmful gender norms has been looked at under specific deep dives, and concrete examples of CSO/WROs' everyday work and risks identified during the project cycle were also included throughout the Prevention Series. Consultation spaces were held in English, French and Spanish – seeking and incorporating feedback before commissioning the briefs. The CAG and EVAW practitioners also made key recommendations on the format of the briefs, three of which were recommended: (a) long format for a research audience; (b) a shorter summary version for practitioners; and (c) and an audio or visual format for wider accessibility.

The most important feedback provided by practitioners and the CAG was that the pathways have the potential to highlight: a) the intersecting nature of prevention strategies, b) the enormous complexity and non-linear nature of the work and c) the grounding of the framework in practitioners' knowledge. For instance, a grantee from Latin America noted that "*this is what democratization of knowledge and building up from the reality on the ground looks like.*" Another grantee from West Africa provided feedback that the series was *"an impressive body of work – love that it highlights the messiness that is a crucial part of prevention work on the ground."* Practitioners also stressed the importance of themes such as dealing with backlash and creating adaptive programming when working on prevention, reiterating that the underlying aim of prevention work is often to question structural exclusion and discrimination and this is when pushback is the strongest and adaptation is required; therefore, any documentation of practitioner's strategies across myriad contexts and forms of violence on how to deal with the same would be a strong contribution to the literature.

PHASE 2

Thematic Deep Dives

In Phase 2, after identifying and validating the ten key themes, from November 2020 through March 2022, the UN Trust Fund commissioned the writing of the series of knowledge products in collaboration with civil society organizations featured therein. Taking on early recommendations from stakeholders, these were produced in multiple formats and languages. The primary objective of each review – up to 50 pages each – was to synthesize practice-based learning from seven to ten UN Trust Fund grantees per theme in collaboration with them, so that key recommendations could be provided for practitioners, researchers, and donors and the existing evidence base on that particular thematic could be put in conversation with practice-based learnings. Each synthesis review therefore offers a literature review on each theme followed by a deep dive into CSO/WRO projects, their respective monitoring and evaluation reports, which were utilized for content analysis.

Each brief was co-produced by one or more researchers and 7-10 CSOs/WROs, whose work generated significant practice-based insights on a particular theme and offered contextual and embedded best practices, challenges and useful tools on each identified theme. In creating the selection criteria for the identification of the recommended CSOs/WROs to serve as case studies with each Pathway, the primary criteria was to select projects that had enough PBK detailed within their reviewed report sections to merit a deeper dive and in addition can contribute to addressing neglected areas in global VAWG research. The following selection criteria were used:

- **Geographical representation:** each Deep Dive included projects from different world regions. Projects from Central Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe (areas to date relatively neglected in VAWG research) were a particular priority.
- **Fragile states:** to counter what has been identified as a gap in existing evidence, each Deep Dive includes at least one project implemented within a fragile state.
- **Marginalized groups:** to counter what has been identified as a gap in much existing evidence, each Deep Dive includes at least one project that (also) engages with a marginalized group (such as women and girls living with disabilities, migrant women, women and girls who are IDPs/refugees, sex workers), and one Deep Dive in particular has also been dedicated to this topic.
- **Large and small grants:** each Deep Dive includes projects that received small grants, as well as projects that received large grants from the UN Trust Fund
- **Women's organisations:** each Deep Dive included projects led by a women's organisation.
- **Language:** each Deep Dive includes a mix of English, Spanish and French speaking grantees, i.e. the three languages of operation of the UN Trust Fund.
- **Evaluation rating:** including in each Deep Dive some projects that received a high external evaluation rating, but also at least one that received a fair or weak rating as this might not reflect the actual project quality. After a desk review of their reports and a literature review, extensive focus group discussions and key informant interviews were held between the researcher and the CSOs/WROs in order to put the practice-based learning emerging from each grantee's context in conversation with others'.

After ten full-length synthesis reviews were drafted, each author further synthesized the writing into a shorter summary briefing available in English, French and Spanish. The objective was to translate the paper into an accessible and utilization-focused knowledge product, with the primary audience being the EVAW practitioner and/or donor community. The short briefs are between 10 and 12 pages long.

PHASE 3

Uptake and reflection with the wider community of practice via the webinar series, podcasts and the community platform

In Phase 3, from November 2021 through June 2022, the UN Trust Fund engaged in strategic dissemination and global dialogue around the critical role CSOs/WROs play across diverse contexts and areas of work when it comes to prevention of violence against women and girls. A webinar series called Prevention Tuesdays was launched, which saw over 3,000 participants comprised of researchers, donors, partners, practitioners from CSO/WROs, and member states from around the world, who shared and exchanged lessons and knowledge on the practice of violence prevention. The webinars provided space to:

- Share and discuss the findings and recommendations from the series, by theme.
- Hear directly from CSOs and WROs implementing projects included in the series.
- Promote dialogue between practitioners, researchers, and donors/grant-makers on the topics.
- Gather feedback and additional lessons from the audience on the findings and recommendations.
- Consolidation of the above (post-webinar) into a report to inform UN Trust Fund learning and planning for future knowledge sharing and dissemination.

Extensive planning, coordination, and briefings together with panelists – EVAW practitioners, researchers, donors, and partners – were held to frame discussion and host a webinar on the first Tuesday of every month for eight months. Each webinar was two hours in length, providing time for presentation of findings, round table discussion(s), and engagement with the wider EVAW ecosystem. The webinars provided simultaneous interpretations in Spanish, French, Russian, Arabic and International Sign Language in order to reach a diverse audience. In effect, the synthesis reviews and the findings were used as conversation starters to initiate a global dialogue with a wider group of practitioners around the lessons from the series.

In addition, the findings were also disseminated and discussed in a global multilinguage platform called SHINE. Produced by the UN Trust Fund in collaboration with the Spotlight Initiative, SHINE was introduced as a new community platform for knowledge exchange on EVAW in March 2022. SHINE provides a space for:

- Instant knowledge exchange between partners taking part in the discussion (informing each other about VAWG prevention interventions and resources).
- Instant evidence gathering for advocacy on how this work is being done by CSOs and WROs in diverse contexts.
- Instant insights from partners to validate and test UN Trust Fund learning to date on this subject.

A community of practice on Prevention was created wherein members could be in conversation around the briefs in the series. Discussion boards and consultation spaces were also developed to discuss such topics as resiliency to crisis, the meaning and value of practice-based knowledge, and the various pathways to prevention.

Finally, the UN Trust Fund also commissioned a podcast in order to further amplify the voices of practitioners who were integral to the series. The Pathways to Prevention Podcast was launched in September 2022 as a complement, and was also a direct response to the demand from CSO/WROs through consultations in October 2020, to generate and share knowledge on violence against women in accessible, inclusive, audio-visual and storytelling formats. CSO/WROs already engaged in the Prevention Series, additionally gave voice to the episodes by joining in on discussions and bringing individual and collective voices forward in conversation with each other.

For the UN Trust Fund, Phase 3 also requires a focus on completing the PBK cycle that was begun in Phase 1, understanding that PBK highlights the importance of shared reflection and dissemination. This is being done through continued consultation, surveys, and feedback loops with partners to ensure that there is practical application of the learning that has been gathered through this process (more on this in Section 4).

Poun Sambath, a wheelchair user, receives emergency agricultural material for his family's livelihood and food consumption

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3. KEY THEMATIC LESSONS/FINDINGS EMERGING FROM PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING ON VAWG PREVENTION

This section presents key findings/lessons emerging from the synthesis reviews in the Prevention Series, as well as round table discussion with practitioners, donors and researchers during the Webinar Series presenting each of the ten themes on the Prevention of VAWG.

3.1 Community mobilization

Community mobilization has been identified as a promising and popular strategy to prevent VAWG as it involves creating a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members and encouraging them to work together to identify and address issues that affect them.[4] It has the potential to reduce violence among entire communities, and not just engaged individuals or groups, through engaging a broad range of actors such as community activists, opinion leaders such as faith-based actors, the police, and health and social services (Stern, E., 2021). In some cases, communities mobilized to bring about change by holding governments and other institutions accountable to national and subnational laws and policies.

Learning from Practice: Community Mobilization to Prevent Violence Against Women (Stern, E., 2021) looks at how UN Trust Fund projects design and implement effective community mobilization strategies, including the challenges they experience. Drawing on the experiences of 10 civil society organizations in 10 countries, the review identifies four key characteristics of community mobilization that were discovered to be relevant across initiatives, demonstrating how practice informs theory:

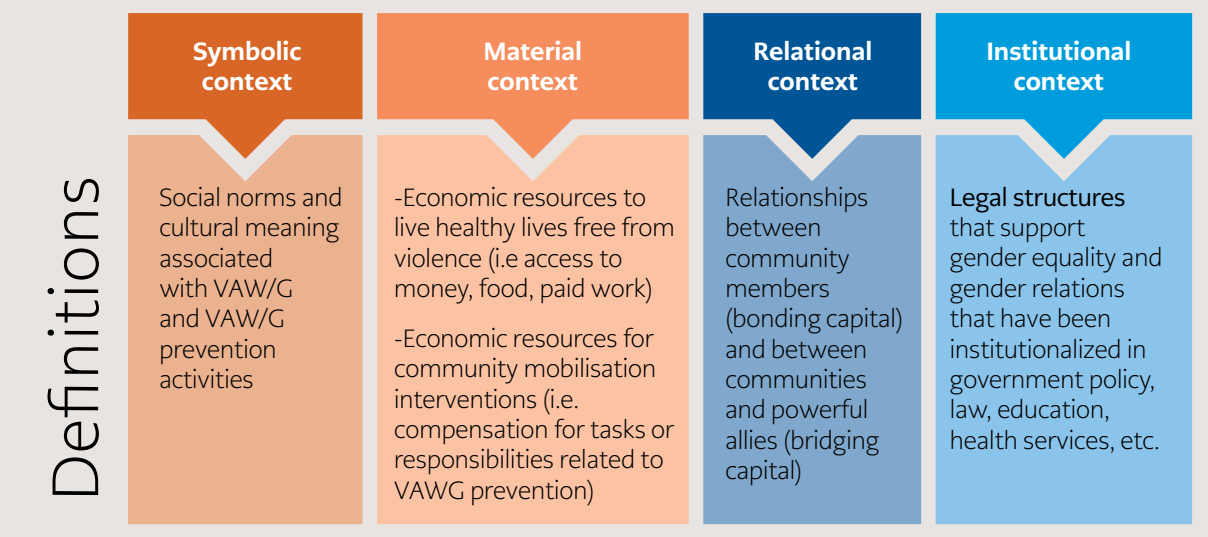
1. The importance of representation and understanding: "Know your community to know your response"
2. The importance of understanding the socioeconomic context and incentives
3. The importance of engaging across and within community groups
4. Linking community mobilization to the institutional context

4 UNICEF, "Community Mobilization: A Guide for Program Managers", https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Community_Mobilization_

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to Campbell and Cornish (2010), success or failure of an intervention depends on how it interacts with symbolic, material and relational dimensions of the social environment. This conceptual framework on community mobilization[5] is used to organize the findings; it synthesizes and analyzes PBK across different contexts (symbolic, material, relational and institutional) and links insights to the broader evidence recognizing that community mobilization should ideally allow communities to challenge broader social and institutional structures that can undermine collective efforts to prevent VAWG.

FIGURE 2: Contextual factors needed to support effective community mobilization for the prevention of intimate partner violence



LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

The importance of representation and understanding: "Know your community to know your response".

To prevent VAWG, key emerging symbolic lessons underline that knowing and understanding a community is vital in developing prevention programmes. This includes being contextually relevant; using appropriate community entry points and language; making community spaces safer and being responsive to key needs and priorities to prevent VAWG.

Practitioners found that effective community mobilization interventions need to be culturally relevant, appropriate, and tailored to priorities and needs within and across communities. For example, Breakthrough Trust conducted online research with young people in India to learn about the causes, types, and perceptions of violence in their communities. This research was used to develop contextually appropriate activities and adaptations, such as the creation of youth e-platforms, to address sexual harassment issues in public and online spaces.

In addition, finding appropriate community entry points, including appropriate language and values in their society for activities, was also found to be critical to gain trust and support for VAWG prevention programmes.

5 See Campbell, C., and Cornish, F. (2010), "Towards a fourth generation of approaches for HIV/AIDS management: creating contexts for effective community mobilization", AIDS CARE, vol. 22, No. 2. 1569–79.

For example, The Family Support Center in Solomon Islands discovered that men were initially hesitant to talk about women's rights, but when alternate ways of approaching the topic were explored and focused on the advantages that both men and women would gain from the changes, they became more receptive.

Gender equity must be included in community mobilization activities in order to effect meaningful change in the community and its social and cultural norms. In Nicaragua, the CSO MADRE used art, theatre, music, dance, and other indigenous cultural practices to help prevent VAWG while also allowing women to participate in traditionally male-dominated activities such as playing the guitar or participating in community dance and theatre performances. This approach allows for the promotion of gender-equitable social norms as well as community mobilization to prevent VAWG.

To be effective, community mobilization should support local organizations and activists, as well as "walk the walk" in terms of ensuring that those involved in project implementation represent the community and demonstrate commitment to project values, including through appropriate and due diligence in the identification and selection of community champions and activists.

The importance of understanding the socioeconomic context and incentives

In terms of the material context, key lessons learned include incorporating economic empowerment activities into community mobilization projects to end VAWG. This is because economic challenges prevent full participation in community mobilization programming and is also a risk factor for VAWG. For example, Equality for Growth in Tanzania identified lack of financial means as one of the main reasons why women do not leave abusive relationships. Practitioners reflected that providing economic assistance to market traders who lacked capital and were experiencing difficulties in their businesses could have increased the project's success.

Also, projects found that it is critical to strike a balance between engaging activists as dedicated volunteers and ensuring that they are not financially burdened, as this is important for long-term sustainability of the projects. Activists were given financial assistance to travel to remote areas, some of which could only be reached by boat. For instance, in India, many of the young activists were supported by referring them to other CSOs for job opportunities. The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction in Kenya started conversations with reformed female circumcisers about other sources of income and connected them with other partners and government authorities.

In addition, experience-based agency should be promoted to allow activists and participants to apply learned skills and knowledge; this includes providing activists with training and ongoing support, recognizing their contributions, and identifying gatekeepers who can hinder or facilitate engagement with project activities.

The importance of engaging across and within community groups

Findings emerging on relational context show that when it comes to ensuring inclusive participation in mobilization activities, the bonding social capital is important: including engaging both across and within different community groups to build relationships and foster trust, mutual respect and create safe spaces for openness. It aims to assure that no one is left behind. For example, in Serbia, Center for Girls noted the importance of sensitively raising awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer rights – including in rural areas and among ethnic minorities – when raising awareness among community members on VAWG.

We try to use mobilization as a way to break boundaries and see how they can have a joint conversation on some difficult issues. We use theatre of the oppressed and this format helps people open up and share their thoughts without feeling fear or guilt. One of the learnings from development of messaging and campaigning has been to be inclusive, as violence gets aggravated for individuals with different identities. (FGD, 22 January 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

It is important to collaborate with stakeholders who hold power and influence, such as religious traditional leaders and governments. Given their credibility and influence, this fosters an enabling environment for bridging social capital and mitigate community resistance.

It is critical for mobilization efforts to consider prevention and response, such as establishing referral links to VAWG response services and ensure that activists, staff, and leaders are able to adequately assist survivors of VAWG, by equiping them with the necessary skills and capabilities.

Linking community mobilization to the institutional context

Key institutional context lessons learned highlight the importance of mobilizing the community to hold governments and institutions accountable for developing and implementing policies and laws to promote gender equality, as well as preventing and responding to VAWG. In Nicaragua, MADRE and local organization Wangki Tangi worked with the police, municipal judges and local government to increase their commitment to justice for women and girls in accordance with the law. In Kenya, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction utilized law enforcement structures and police officers to ensure that laws and policies related to VAWG were properly implemented. This increased the knowledge of the laws and policies among both the community and the police and created a sense of trust and confidence.

In addition, practitioners found that linking community mobilization efforts to relevant government plans and policies is beneficial for increasing the credibility and sustainability of projects responding to VAWG.

Furthermore, projects found that community mobilization interventions have the ability to effectively identify gaps in the quality or capacity of institution-led services for survivors of VAWG, as well as advocate for and train providers to improve services for VAWG survivors. For instance, Raising Voices worked directly with service providers, including police, social workers, and health-care providers, to strengthen their analysis of power imbalances as a core driver of VAW and train them to provide high-quality services to survivors.

Food packets and ration distirbution to the communities.

© Lok Samiti/SAHAYOG.

CHALLENGES

Community mobilization to prevent VAWG faces significant challenges. Practitioners highlighted a few challenges that arose frequently as well as how they mitigated them.

1. The COVID-19 pandemic presented a difficulty in mobilizing the community, particularly in terms of restrictions imposed by governments. This necessitated the adaptation of mobilization activities virtually, thus reducing interactions with the community.
2. Working with unresponsive formal or patriarchal institutions was difficult for practitioners. In this case, practitioners collaborated with communities to convert national laws and global standards into local regulations to prevent violence against women and girls and advance gender equality.
3. It was discovered that, as a result of mobilization efforts being inaccessible, failing to specifically include people living with disabilities, or failing to track the results of their programmes among this population, the marginalization of specific groups was widespread across projects. However, this was mitigated through participatory techniques, such as theatre of the oppressed, which support more inclusive community engagement.

In terms of sustaining community mobilization throughout the projects regardless of the challenges, practitioners reflected that projects' success may have been improved by longer durations as well as improving economic empowerment activities of the community.

In addition, projects adapted to focus on training and engaging the community members in different ways and strike a balance between a holistic approach and a more stakeholder-targeted approach.

To read more on this theme, access Stern, E. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Community Mobilization to Prevent Violence Against Women" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/07/learning-from-practice-community-mobilization-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.2 Engaging faith-based and traditional actors

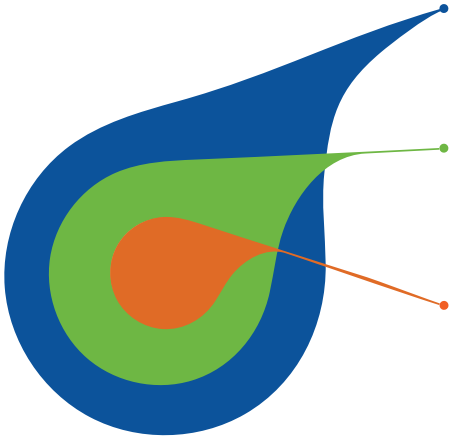
Faith-based and traditional actors are increasingly recognized as key to preventing VAWG. These actors can on the one hand promote beliefs, norms and practices that support and enable prevention of VAWG, but on the other hand can also encourage and legitimize certain forms of violence. However, empirical evidence shows that the reach and influence of faith-based and traditional actors cannot be ignored.

Learning from Practice: Engaging Faith-based and Traditional Actors in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (Le Roux, E. and Palm, S., 2021) explores how to engage faith-based and traditional actors by drawing on the experiences of 10 civil society organizations implementing projects to prevent violence against women and girls in different countries and contexts. It showcases the unique contributions of different types and sizes of organizations, from small locally based youth groups to large international human rights organizations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Palm and Eyber 2019 framework is adapted to facilitate understanding of what emerged from practitioner learning. The framework distinguishes three types of capital associated with faith-based and traditional actors' contributions to VAWG prevention: spiritual capital, social capital, and access capital. Access capital emphasizes the role of faith-based and traditional actors in providing VAWG practitioners with access to a specific community. The ability of faith-based and traditional actors to leverage their community connections to support (or oppose) VAWG prevention is highlighted by social capital. Finally, spiritual capital entails utilizing distinct forms of faith-based resources and authority.[6]

FIGURE 3: Levels of capital associated with contribution of faith-based and traditional actors to VAWG prevention



ACESS CAPITAL

religious and traditional leaders are often effective de facto gatekeepers to local communities. Engaging them in this role does not necessarily require their ongoing participation. However, it needs their initial buy in. Without this early endorsement, many communities may reject other VAWG prevention approaches.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

religious and traditional actors can bring social influence, organizations, religious communities, funds, buildings, people and motivation to the wider task of ending violence against women and girls. They offer instrumental value within society, alongside other actors, owing to their social roles.

SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

spiritual traditions uniquely draw on, and engage faith-related resources and authority, e.g. prayer, meditation, sermons, sacred texts and religious rituals. Spiritual capital can be used to help transform beliefs and practices that underpin VAWG, reaffirm religious imperatives for prevention and stand against any moral or spiritual legitimization of types of violence .

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Five key themes emerged inductively from practitioners' insights as they carried out intervention activities with faith-based and traditional actors:

1. the roles of faith-based and cultural belief systems in VAWG and VAWG prevention
2. the roles of faith-based and traditional actors in VAWG and VAWG prevention
3. the importance of faith-based and traditional actors engaging with social norms
4. practical strategies for working with faith-based actors for VAWG prevention
5. practical strategies for working with traditional actors for VAWG prevention

6 See Palm, S., and Eyber, C. (2019), "Why faith? Engaging the Mechanisms of faith to end violence against children", briefing paper (Washington, D.C., Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities EVAC Hub)

The roles of faith-based and cultural belief systems in VAWG and VAWG prevention

Faith-based and cultural belief systems form complex long-term belief systems that are passed down through generations, shaping the values that underpin or challenge specific forms of violence. They must be addressed as underlying value systems that influence VAWG norms and practices and should not be reduced to individual actors.

Belief systems and their rituals can make a positive contribution to ending violence against women by assisting VAWG survivors in developing resilience and healing in ways that empower them. For example, Fundación Mundubat in Colombia looked to indigenous and Afro-Colombian rituals by recalling and reclaiming ancestral practices, which encouraged women to recall what their mothers and grandmothers had taught them about ways of healing the body and spirit. Through an approach that integrated the use of water, rivers, and medicinal plants, survivors were able to both heal from trauma and strengthen their cultural identity. Practitioner believed reclaiming core spiritual values such as justice was a resource for prevention.

Harmful faith-based and cultural beliefs can be internalized by everyone, including women and girls, complicating the idea of a simple victim-perpetrator binary in the context of VAWG. It may be impossible to fully address the roots of many harmful practices until sacred connections are discussed, severed, or remapped so that they no longer harm women and girls. For example, in Nepal, Restless Development implemented a project to address a harmful practice called chhaupadi (menstruation stigma) – that a menstruating woman touching a tap will pollute water, or a menstruating girl drinking milk will offend the goddess and negatively affect household livestock –, which shows the direct connections made between spiritual beliefs and harmful practices. The youth organization illustrates how faith-based systems possess unique spiritual capital that can be used to justify harm or to support VAWG prevention, and shows that the desacralization of menstruation stigma must involve those who are viewed as authoritative to tackle these beliefs about purity. To do this, they engaged local faith-based experts fully in discussions on need for change in the light of already accepted idea that faith beliefs should be life-giving.

Practitioners highlight that deeper attention needs to be paid to faith-based and cultural systems which include sacred texts and rituals that are transmitted across generations. These underlying value systems often impact VAWG norms and practices, not only the individual actors within the system, and can be also internalized by women and girls.

The roles of faith-based and traditional actors in VAWG and VAWG prevention

Practitioner insights highlight that **Faith-based and traditional actors hold influence in four main ways: as customary law custodians; as social norms influencers; as sacred ritual holders; and as informal culture keepers often tied to other social systems.** Bypassing this influence could potentially lead to programme failure.

Practitioner insights highlighted that **religion and culture both have significant social capital that can be leveraged for VAWG prevention interventions.** Local-level faith-based actors have various existing faith platforms and infrastructures (sermons, Sunday schools, scripture sessions, church camps, couples' counselling, savings and loans groups, religious youth groups, etc.) at their disposal, which were used to disseminate VAWG prevention messages.

In addition, **faith-based and traditional leaders often have a particular gatekeeping and formally influential role that can be authoritative for communities.** This gatekeeper influence can reach further than what is often considered the official domain of a traditional or faith leader. For example, in Liberia, Episcopal Relief and Development worked with (predominantly male) faith leaders, which was an entry point into working with other groups, such as women and young people, including male and female young people in schools. Faith leaders trained and raised awareness around the need to end VAWG, which not only legitimized, but also further educated and mobilized women and young people to advocate around the issue and ultimately led to collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the implementation of a gender-based violence (GBV) code of conduct in schools.

When working with faith-based and traditional actors, time and sustained engagement are required for VAWG prevention to be successful. For potential sustainability, both individual-level and community-level change require ongoing discussions, meetings, training, mentoring and guidance over an extended period.

The importance of faith-based and traditional actors engaging with social norms

Tackling the social norms that lie beneath the harmful practices is essential for sustained change. Finding innovative leveraging points to mobilize key insider groups within religious and cultural systems to support gender equal approaches can help to transform from within rather than impose from outside. This can require dialogue and accompaniment over time.

> *"Social norms remain a big part of root causes of violence, because society is built on how people think. So (we must be) challenging those social norms in our communities, so it brings about transformation … How do we challenge … those norms that are negative, which fuel VAWG and understand better ways to balance power and prevent violence" (FGD, 30 November 2020).*

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

There are a number of takeaways relating to the importance of faith-based and traditional actors engaging with social norms.

First, they are not a **homogeneous group. Innovative leverage points can mobilize certain groups to work towards changing social norms and to support gender-equal approaches from within.** This may include, for example, engaging grandmothers, female cutters and women preachers who have credibility and influence within these systems.

Second, faith-based and traditional actors are often insiders in communities and are credible influencers on patriarchal social norms. Their active engagement counters perceptions that gender and human rights ideas are imposed from outside, and it can result in credible synergies with core values in existing traditions for VAWG prevention.

Third, there are risks associated with engaging faith-based and traditional actors who may be enmeshed in patriarchal systems. They may need accompaniment to transform their own inherited gendered beliefs before they can become part of social norms change for VAWG prevention. However, programmes should not assume their complicity.

Practical strategies for working with faith-based actors for VAWG prevention

Engaging with faith-based actors should not be an exclusive focus, but rather part of a larger, multisectoral effort to prevent VAWG. Faith-based actors should interact with other actors and be informed about their roles in VAWG prevention. For example, the Sindh Community Foundation in Pakistan engaged with faith leaders as part of a collective, multi-stakeholder effort that included health practitioners, the police, lawyers, the media and CSOs. In this context, faith leaders were recognized as service providers whose accountability could be emphasized, as they network with a range of other referral points.

Practitioner insights suggest finding ways to utilize their spiritual capital and creating dialogues around these by thinking carefully about whom to work with to build shared messaging. This also avoids working in silos, but instead as part of the wider community, tied to other stakeholders.

Besides, engaging with top-level faith-based actors can be a valuable strategic approach that allows for system-wide adoption and support for subsequent intervention activities. Simultaneously, lower-tier or informal faith-based actors can provide unique access and activism.

Efforts should be made to identify and engage female faith-based actors, as they may offer unique access and activism. While their role may be as informal or formal culture keepers, but they receive a level of power in these roles and take responsibility for passing traditions on to the next generation. For example, in settings like Tanzania, female cutters were identified as primary perpetrators of FGM/C. Although female cutters derive some economic and social power through this role, which can be critical for their own survival, part of the Amref project approach was to work with faith-based and traditional actors to "de-sanctify" this ritual and show that it is not required by religious tradition. The refusal of actors to carry out rituals that sacralize harming women and girls and their development of new sacred rituals has shown to have a powerful impact.

Also, religious actors should be engaged in contextually appropriate ways that challenge their own attitudes and prejudices without scaring them away, and that allow for the development of a trusting relationship.

Leveraging the reach and influence of faith-based actors requires first working with them as individuals, and then determining the best strategy for mobilizing them for VAWG prevention.

It is also important to use language and concepts that the actors with whom you are working understand, as well as to accept differences in your and their points of view. In this way, bridges of trust and mutual understanding can be built to work together to prevent VAWG.

Practical strategies for working with traditional actors for VAWG prevention

While traditional systems may often be patriarchal, traditional actors are a unique group and involve a diverse range of male and female "cultural custodians" who convene community rituals that hold spiritual, social and economic power. The initial process of relationship building with traditional actors can take time, but once project ownership is built, it can be very effective.

Traditional actors wield power over community attitudes toward VAWG in four ways: a) as custodians of customary laws, particularly in remote, fragile, or conflict-affected contexts where they may be the only access to justice available for women and girls; b) as influencers on social norms that underpin VAWG; c) as holders of sacred rituals; and finally, d) as informal or formal culture keepers frequently linked to other socioeconomic, legal, or political systems. These actors bring with them distinct authority and platforms that can be used for or against prevention.

Practitioner insights highlight that equipping faith-based actors to first change their own mindsets and transform their inherited, gendered beliefs before challenging harmful social norms, is regarded as a critical step in preventing VAWG.

In addition, engaging with sacred texts critically but respectfully was found to be another method of changing mindsets for VAWG prevention.

CHALLENGES

Amongst the considerable challenges that CSO/WROs face as they implement programmes with faith-based and traditional actors, practitioners found that:

- when CSOs/WROs were perceived to condemn specific VAWG practices such as child marriage or FGMC outright, it led to practices going underground and becoming more harmful to women and girls;

- some traditional actors may appear to agree in public but still support harmful norms or practices in private, especially when livelihood or social status is at stake;
- when the discourse was seen as driven by outsiders, it was likely to meet resistance at family level; and
- work is often associated with issues that are seen as controversial or taboo by faith-based and traditional actors, and this must be handled sensitively to avoid putting frontline activists at risk.

To read more on this theme, access Le Roux, E. and Palm, S. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Engaging Faith-based and Traditional Actors in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/07/engaging-faith-based-and-traditional-actors-in-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.3 Mobilizing women

UN Trust Fund projects mobilize women to become agents of change in their own lives in multiple ways, but one of the most used approaches was to identify, recruit and mentor an intermediary cadre of women who lead the mobilization of other women and their communities towards social change. This intermediary cadre of women are referred to with the catch-all term "community facilitators" (CF) because they are a crucial link between the VAWG prevention projects and the broader community of women that they want to engage with.

Learning from Practice: Mobilizing women as agents of change to prevent violence against women and girls (Biradavolu, M., 2021) looks at how efforts to mobilize women are facilitated, supported, and sustained. Drawing on the experiences of 10 civil society organizations in 10 countries and territories, the review finds that, according to grantee organizations, community facilitators are important for four critical reasons:

1. They are critical for breaking the silence on violence, which is a crucial step towards prevention.
2. They make projects that are more demand-driven.
3. They are able to reach the most vulnerable women and girls.
4. They allow projects to shift the burden of change from any one individual to collective action.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding how power and gender dynamics operate is at the heart of increasing women's agency, and this process begins with self-confidence and self-efficacy reflections. Campbell and Mannell's framework[7] is used to lay the groundwork for investigating how projects designed and implemented mobilization activities across time, space, and networks. Each of the three dimensions provides learning and insights into the processes that lead to a shift among women from being beneficiaries of projects to authors of their own narratives and agents of change for others.

7 See Biradavolu, M. (2021), "Mobilizing Women as Agent of Change to Prevent Violence Against Women", Learning from Practice Brief Series, Issue No. 3 (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women).

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Mobilizing Women Over Time

Time has been identified as a critical dimension for VAWG prevention projects aimed at increasing women's agency. Because the UN Trust Fund projects in this case study were funded over the span of 2–3 years, it is important to consider what is possible in that time frame and what activities make a difference. All projects began with a process of reflection that raises self-confidence and self-efficacy and works incrementally to increase women's agency over time.

However, **shifts in women's attitudes and behaviours because of mobilization efforts are not always linear;** it is not that one goes from being not empowered to empowered, rather change occurs sporadically.

Nevertheless, **women can be mobilized within a time frame of 2 to 3 years.** For example, in Iraq the Free Yezidi Foundation did so with the harikara, who gave refugee women tools and resources in extreme circumstances, and enabled them within a very short timeframe to become authors of their own narrative.

Mobilizing women across space

A second dimension in which projects were successful in mobilizing women as change agents in efforts to prevent violence was the creation of safe spaces, which is highlighted in five ways: (1) creating a physical space, (2) creating safe spaces for meditation and/or reflection, (3) creating safe spaces by paying attention to language, (4) making VAWG a safe topic, and (5) identifying "safe persons".

Creating a **physical safe space** requires the separation of a space that women may not have had access to before. Several projects had a physical location – project offices, skills training centres, vocational training centres or women's shelters – where women felt safe to gather. Spaces were safest when they were accessible to the women and acceptable to their families.

Creating safe spaces for contemplation was found to be a creative solution when CSOs/WROs were unable to offer permanent physical spaces. Instead, they offered temporary safe spaces. For example, in Nepal, The Story Kitchen held "storytelling workshops", where community facilitators who were survivors of the country's civil war became change agents by interviewing women like themselves about their experiences of violence, offering them a chance to reclaim their dignity and become authors of their own narratives to break the cycle of intergenerational violence. The Story Kitchen conceived of such spaces, not only as "safe spaces", but also as "brave spaces".

Creating safe spaces also requires paying attention to language. Many projects worked in multilingual contexts, where the native languages of the most vulnerable were not the official or dominant language. Being able to speak in the dominant language opens doors and creates possibilities. Conversely, an inability to communicate in the dominant language creates feelings of alienation and disempowerment, which thwarts the ability of women to seek justice. Two projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (Women's Justice Initiative in Guatemala and Red Nacional de Promoción de la Mujer in Peru) worked with indigenous women who felt powerless in spaces of authority – for example, in healthcare settings, courts and police stations – because of an inability or a hesitancy to speak Spanish. By conducting trainings and other activities with women in their native tongues (Kaqchikel in Guatemala and Quechua in Peru), the projects created a safe space where community facilitators learned about their rights and discussed how to approach local health and legal authorities to bring an end to violence.

The final two aspects of space that practitioners spoke about had to do with making violence a safe topic for discussion and creating "safe persons" in the community who became confidantes. For example, non-project spaces such as antenatal clinics could be made "safer" by ensuring that VAWG becomes a safe topic for discussion. And, where civil society spaces are shrinking, projects engaged with government institutions, for example introducing GBV as a safe topic in a health intervention. Practitioner reflections indicate that this approach is promising when working to prioritize women's health, as health service providers would sometimes ignore the issue.

Furthermore, as survivors who want to talk about violence may not have an outlet within their community, creating "safe persons" who become confidants enables women to come forward without fear or stigma. As the Women's Justice Initiative in Guatemala shared:

> *"Sometimes you cannot imagine the places where women find us and tell us their problems, it can be in the community washing area or in any other place. This is when we take advantage of this opportunity to tell the woman that she has rights … that she deserves to live a life without violence and that she can seek help and support."*

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Mobilizing agents of change through networks

Another dimension through which projects mobilized women to become change agents was by widening women's social networks – both their interpersonal networks and their networks with an array of institutional actors that women came into contact with. All 10 projects enabled women to become acquainted with each other and, over time, develop bonds of friendship and mutual support for sharing problems, finding solutions and engaging collectively, both in the intervention and leisure activities.

Networks with institutional actors was found to be critical for CSOs/WROs, as well. Women community facilitators witnessed a significant shift in their self-confidence, and other project participants benefited by having an anchor in the community who could speak on their behalf with powerful institutional actors. Through this, projects gained by having a cadre of confident women committed to networking, raising awareness and advocating for the implementation of violence prevention activities.

CHALLENGES

There are significant obstacles to mobilizing women to become change agents. Three challenges that came up repeatedly, as well as the mitigation strategies used, were highlighted by practitioners.

1. **Recruitment of community facilitators.** Recruitment difficulties arise when it is unclear from the start how projects will benefit the proposed participants' lives. As a result, it is critical to clearly communicate the benefits and risks from the start.
2. **Retention of community facilitators.** Retaining community facilitators can be difficult. They may face re-traumatization, burnout, or being overburdened with work; however, findings indicate that projects responded to challenges in recruitment by conducting advocacy with potential women participants on project goals and engaging in a participatory process to designing and including the CFs' goals to respond to the needs of women, thus leading to increased investment and local ownership of the project. For example, the European Centre for Minority Issues in Kosovo stopped doing home visits to protect Community Facilitators from burnout and potentially violent situations, established psychological support systems and increased compensation for them.

3. **Sustainability of project results**. Sustaining projects is typically difficult; however, utilizing approaches that donors recognize has enabled CSO/WROs to secure project funding. Such approaches included engaging with female community facilitators in more than one way should be adopted. Initiatives pour la Protection des Droits des Femmes in Morocco, for example, set up community support activities in the women's neighbourhoods, rotating childcare and recreational activities or mobilizing women to work on local issues relevant to their daily lives. When their goals were designed to respond to the women's needs, then they were more invested.

For all ten projects included in this review, results were sustained in three critical ways:

1. Projects' approach of using women community facilitators was recognized by donors, which enabled them to secure further funding
2. Projects continued to support the networks formed during the grant period to scale up; and
3. Project results were institutionalized within their national context, where it was found that projects aimed to "leave something behind" by creating a crack in the patriarchal order.

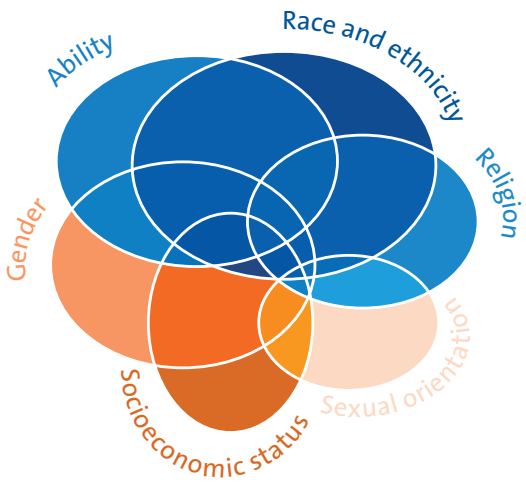
To read more on this theme, access Biradavolu, M. (2021) "Learning from Practice: Mobilizing Women as Agents of Change to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/08/learning-from-practice-mobilizing-women-as-agents-of-change-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.4 Exploring intersectional approaches

Intersectional approaches to the prevention of VAWG are receiving more attention around the world, considering 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. When designing and implementing projects, exploring intersectional approaches is critical to preventing violence against women and girls, and key to realizing the 2030 Agenda, Sustainable Development Goal #2: Leave no one behind.

Learning from Practice: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (Palm, S. and Le Roux, E., 2021) addresses a gap in the literature on how to apply intersectionality in practice in relation to programmes to prevent violence against women and girls. The brief draws on the experiences of 10 civil society organizations operating in various countries and contexts.

FIGURE 4: A Visural Representation of Intersectionality



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In exploring intersectional approaches to VAWG, the researchers designed a conceptual framework with three stages to better understand how VAWG prevention projects are evolving in their various journeys with intersectionality. The first stage, identification of vulnerabilities, which is the starting point in identifying women and girls who are vulnerable to violence because of overlapping aspects of their identities or circumstances. The second, intersectional design and implementation, entails considering alternative ways for project interventions to address the risk of VAWG because of intersecting identities, rather than targeting only specific groups of women with services or prevention programming. Finally, intersectional practice, in which projects prioritize the experiences of those who are marginalized or made vulnerable in overlapping ways by current systems and power relations.[8]

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Four key lessons emerged inductively from practitioners who engaged with intersectional approaches to prevent VAWG:

1. applying intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention
2. making intersecting vulnerabilities visible for VAWG prevention
3. participation in intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention
4. partnering for intersectional approaches to VAWG prevention

Applying intersectional approaches

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.

The projects included in this sample used diverse, specific entry points into VAWG prevention to identify specific groups of women and girls with multiple vulnerabilities and did not try to "do everything". Focusing on a primary intersection between gender and one other aspect is effective – if practitioners remain alert to new intersections that emerge, and resist homogenizing those in the groups they initially focused on. For example, Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand recognized that women with diverse sexual and gender identities are at greater risk of experiencing violence, and the organization focused its project entirely on LBT women. Leonard Cheshire Disability Trust in Zimbabwe and Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia both addressed the increased vulnerability to violence of girls and women living with disabilities; they however designed very different prevention interventions because Leonard Cheshire Disability Trust engaged with GWWD who live in rural communities, and the Mental Disability Rights Initiative engaged with girls and women with mental disabilities who live in residential institutions.

Besides, **vulnerabilities are not merely additive and fixed; instead, multiple vulnerabilities often combine in unique, context-specific ways to form complex cycles of compounding, dynamic risks of violence.** For example, War Child Canada in Jordan highlight their work with Syrian girls and the centring of a gender-responsive human rights approach to conflict. Their project participants were vulnerable for fleeing conflicts and encountered new challenges as migrants. Their age also meant they faced an increased gendered risk of child marriage, tied to patriarchal beliefs about purity, which is further compounded by migrant families' need for economic stability and political factors that may exclude girls from attending school. Aspects of their project included involving groups with multiple vulnerabilities in the design of the project curriculum, such as engaging a women's group to identify issues they would wish

8 See Palm, S. and Le Roux, E. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women).

to discuss in group sessions; and remaining agile enough for course-correction and re-design, such as the change needed to adjust the previously narrow focus on out-of-school girls only to be more inclusive of in-school girls.

Lessons emerging from practice also 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.

Making intersecting vulnerabilities visible

Women's overlapping vulnerabilities are frequently invisiblized in a number of domains, including data collection and analysis, service provision, self-stigmatization, legal and policy systems, and perpetration. Addressing this is an important step in EVAWG programming and involves working both with women and girls themselves, as well as with social systems. And projects must acknowledge and address domains concurrently to make these interconnected layers of invisibility visible.

If women are treated as a homogeneous group, this invisibilization and silencing of certain voices and vulnerabilities often remains. Practitioners should give attention to many of these domains concurrently to make these interconnected layers of invisibility visible.

> *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).*

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

In practice, it may be unrealistic to expect projects to identify all vulnerabilities at the start; an ongoing process of adaptation needs to be built in to deal with new intersections becoming visible to VAWG prevention practitioners.

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. These need to be understood and taken seriously in projects.

Participation in intersectional approaches

Lessons learned emerging from practitioners working with women who have intersecting vulnerabilities to violence highlight that it is important to involve these women in the design and implementation of VAWG prevention programming. This allows lived experiences to guide the intervention's design and strategies, and it has the potential to positively transform vulnerable groups' identity markers to build resilience.

Meaningful participation – for example through curriculum development, peer engagement, and training and advocacy activities – is required for intersectional practice and allows for greater programme uptake and impact.

Peer-to-peer engagement has also been identified as a promising approach in VAWG prevention programming for groups with intersecting vulnerability to violence. Peers appear to have a unique ability to identify, reach, and influence among themselves.

Furthermore, advocacy by individuals with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence is frequently effective in combating group invisibility, motivating other stakeholders to respond to their realities and needs, and empowering these women.

Partnering for intersectional approaches

In terms of advocacy, **partnerships were found to be a major strength**, as joint platform and activities tend to generate more interest and can amplify the voices of women and girls made vulnerable to violence in multiple ways. For example, Equality in China created joint opportunities for advocacy through a national conference with four organizations with diverse specialist experience on sexual orientation; HIV and AIDs; youth; and media.

Findings from practitioners highlight that, **partnerships for VAWG prevention between organizations representing different groups with intersecting vulnerabilities to violence enable 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.

To read more on this theme, access Palm, S. and Le Roux, E. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/08/learning-from-practice-exploring-intersectional-approaches-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.5 Training for behaviour change

Interventions that are designed to prevent VAWG are often complex in design and address multiple drivers simultaneously. In their design, practitioners often include trainings to change behaviours and shift social norms of communities. Trainings are therefore a powerful tool in prevention interventions in connecting the wider body of knowledge around gender and VAWG prevention with learning through practice, as noted in the knowledge brief *Learning from Practice: Training for Behaviour Change to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (Viswanathan, R., 2021)*.

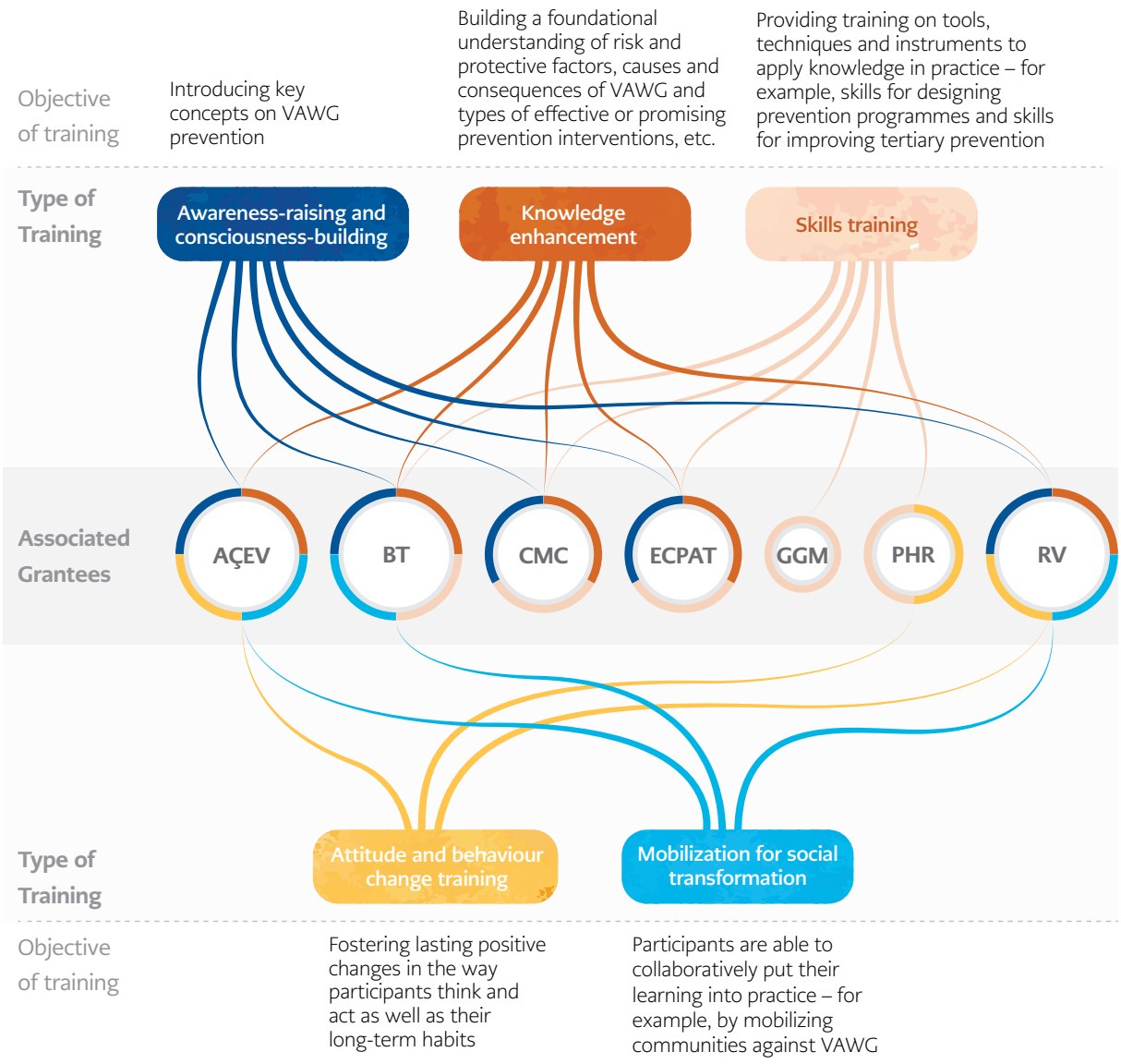
In their interventions, UN Trust Fund projects used training as a key strategic activity for transformative change. They used training in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes, ranging from developing a fundamental understanding of the causes and consequences of VAWG and VAWG prevention to engaging participants in a process to change individual practices in the context of their work or daily interactions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

VAWG prevention training that aims to change behaviors should be designed to nudge participants to be self-critical as they unpack what gender and violence mean to them and examine how violence manifests itself around them and in their society. As a result, the review adapted a training typology from the UN Women Training Centre, which identifies five types of training: awareness raising and consciousness building, knowledge enhancement, skills training, attitude, and behavior change training, and mobilization for social transformation. These trace the trajectory of learning and unlearning and unlock a sense of agency and short-term behavioral changes that can then be amplified into shifting norms.[9]

9 See UN Women (2016), "Typology of Training for Gender Equality" (New York, UN Women Training Centre).

FIGURE 5: Mapping training typologies to the interventions



LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Themes emerging from the 10 projects included in this PBK review include: the importance of design in training for VAWG prevention; designing training to support learning and unlearning trajectories; importance of training tools and resources; networks and communities of practice; importance of training wider sets of stakeholders in the project ecosystem; and using training to achieve sustainability and scale. Below is an overview of the key lessons learned across the findings, highlighting how practice can inform theory.

The importance of design in training for VAWG prevention

Lessons from the importance of design in training for VAWG prevention highlight that the design phase is critical and complex in VAWG prevention interventions and requires a deep understanding of how to adapt training methodologies to the local contexts and communities.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure that the project implementers and facilitators are themselves trained before rolling out training activities for behaviour change. This is to ensure the trainers uphold the values they are committed to imparting, as well as build trust with communities they are embedded in. For example, the grantee from Uganda, Raising Voices, trained community activists to empower them and provide the skills needed for their work. Their training followed the SASA![10] methodology.

Also, practitioners reveal that, in addition to training particular agents of change in each of their projects, training secondary stakeholders to ensure that they "get on board" is critical, because their support can significantly affect the outcomes of these projects.

"It tries to be aspirational. It tries to really promote and prompt critical thinking and consciousness-raising. So in a way it is like the community activists staying a step ahead of the community itself. [They] need to really understand the SASA! materials, but also go through their own kind of change process so that they can better facilitate and support that work at the community level. Because the community activists ... are women and men who live and work in and are part of the communities where they are facilitating activities" (Raising Voices, interview, 18 February 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Designing training to support learning and unlearning trajectories

Findings emerging from designing trainings to support learning and unlearning trajectories appropriately highlight the need for practitioners to ensure that training spaces do not replicate the power dynamics that VAWG prevention interventions attempt to shift, dismantle, and unlearn. They must not replicate power inequalities between participants or participants and trainers, so participants feel safe and able to contribute and engage critically.

Moreover, training programmes should be designed to support individuals as they reach turning points in their trajectories and progress from one stage to the next. This can be achieved by designing phased training, in which the intensity waxes and wanes and the training is combined with support and mentorship. Where skill-based training is provided, training could be designed to reinforce skills over time through simulations of potential scenarios, experiential sessions interspersed with periods away during which participants can apply their learning in the sector concerned, as well as expert mentoring.

In addition, designing trainings must allow participants to engage critically with the subject matter and apply it to their lives. Storytelling as a training strategy was one way to bridge theoretical knowledge to contextually relevant learning.

10 SASA! is a methodology that takes a benefits-based approach to VAWG prevention. To read more, visit: https://raisingvoices.org/resources/unpacking-the-sasa-approach-2/

Importance of training tools and resources

As for the importance of training tools and resources, findings indicate that manuals, lexicons, toolkits, apps, and websites were vital to codify good practices, streamline procedures and create an institutional history. These tools should be put together in collaboration with stakeholders and embedded at the heart of the training sessions.

Moreover, manuals and lexicons were more likely to be used if introduced in sessions and if participants were shown how to use them in their work. For example, Physicians for Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo received feedback on the significance of having a lexicon of medical terms from participants. The lexicon made legal professionals more willing to learn about sexual violence crimes and made it easier for doctors, law enforcement, and legal professionals to work together.

One magistrate described, "... we don't bother them much because when we don't understand the document, we just open – we open the lexicon, and we are clarified, and we don't call them for that." Legal professionals in DRC [the Democratic Republic of the Congo] demonstrate their commitment to behaviors change by teaching lessons learned from PHR trainings to other colleagues, one DRC attorney said: "We've since organized a workshop with 30 magistrates and invited one of our local medical colleagues from the workshop to speak to us about medical evidence and psychosocial care of victims of sexual violence" (PHR, results and activity report, p. 15).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

In addition, lessons emerging reveal that it is useful to train project implementers on using multimedia and social media to initiate conversations with communities on VAWG.

Besides, findings indicate that training individuals to create online spaces for engagement on VAWG prevention has been a successful strategy because they can help manage knowledge to support VAWG prevention, and information collated online can make critical issues more visible.

Networks and communities of practice

Lessons on networks and communities of practice reveal that networks and informal shared spaces that develop in the context of training can be valuable spaces for participants to continue the process of learning and sharing their experiences long after the end of the training sessions.

Moreover, practitioner find social media and messaging apps and platforms useful in creating effective virtual spaces for learning and sharing. However, the choice of the application or platform should be made based on the objectives of the group or space.

In addition, CSOs pointed out that social media and messaging apps work on a personal level, as the individual is the "unit". People are connected to each other, not the organizations they belong to. Therefore, it is important to continue supporting organizations beyond the in-person training.

Importance of training wider sets of stakeholders in the project ecosystem

In terms of training wider sets of stakeholders in the project ecosystem, **lessons emerging indicate that it is important to have greater cross-sector training that can bring different sectoral teams working on cases related to gender-based violence together** because these trainings can build trust and lead to better service delivery.

Furthermore, practitioner insights show the importance of assessing and analyzing training participants in advance on their level of gender awareness. For example, conducting a power analysis of stakeholders[11] can help to identify the stakeholders that need training in an organization. Conducting power analyses upstream was found to be helpful in identifying stakeholders that need to be reached through training. In the case of the media, for example, organizations should not only work with journalists and reporters but should also engage with the management of media houses as well as editors.

Using training to achieve sustainability and scale

In terms of training to achieve sustainability and scale, findings reveal that when training is imparted effectively, the sustainability of VAWG interventions truly rides on the shoulders of the participants.

CSOs also reported that the training-of-trainers model must be closely monitored to ensure that trained partner organizations stay faithful to the original methodology in their contexts.

Furthermore, as interventions scale to new contexts or geographies, it is inevitable that their core models adapt. Finding a balance between adaptation and the core model is important.

CHALLENGES

As for challenges experienced by CSOs it is evident that the transition to online spaces and training during the pandemic posed a challenge for the CSO involved in providing trainings for VAWG prevention.

Another key challenge faced by CSOs is in seeing the projects through well after the funding for the initial programme has been exhausted.

However, it emerged that when trainings are conducted effectively, the sustainability of the projects rest on the shoulders of the participants. As a result, all projects focused on ensuring that participants of trainings become the face of interventions in their communities or organization.

To read more on this theme, access Viswanathan, R. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Training for Behaviour Change to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/10/training-for-behaviour-change

3.6 Adolescent-focused approaches

Adolescent-focused approaches to preventing VAWG are a critical area of intervention and research. Both boys and girls, but in particular girls, face new gendered risks at this stage of life due to their increased vulnerability to various forms of violence and harmful practices. Practice-based insights from CSOs/WROs have shown that adolescent-focused approaches can be a promising entry point for early VAWG prevention.

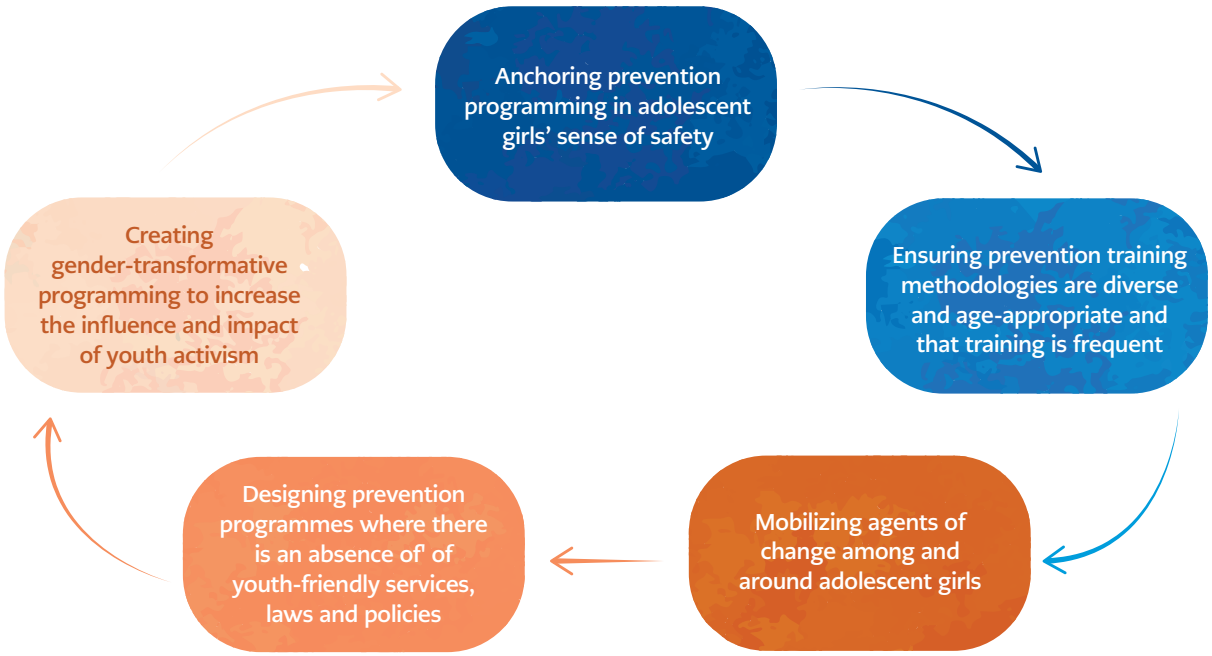
11 It is a method for understanding a system that involves identifying the main players or stakeholders and evaluating their individual motivations or their effects on the system. https://policy-powertools.org/Tools/Understanding/docs/stakeholder_power_tool_english.pdf

Learning from Practice: Adolescent Focused Approaches to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (Majumdar, S., 2021) draws out some cross-cutting best practices, challenges and lessons from 10 diverse civil society organizations that used adolescent-focused approaches to prevent violence against women and girls in different contexts.

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Five key themes/project design decisions emerged inductively from the insights of practitioners implementing UN Trust Fund-funded intervention activities with adolescents: (i) building self-efficacy, confidence and skills for preventing violence; (ii) ensuring that training methodologies are diverse and age-appropriate and that training is frequent; (iii) mobilizing agents of change among and around adolescent girls; (iv) designing prevention interventions for adolescents in resource-constrained environments where there is an absence of youth-friendly services, laws and policies; and (v) creating gender-transformative programming to increase the influence and impact of youth activism. **Practitioners highlight that these are seen as closely linked and mutually reinforcing design elements and displayed in the below Conceptual Framework.**

FIGURE 6: Key design features of adolescent-focused approaches



Building self-efficacy, confidence and skills for preventing violence

Findings on important entry point/starting points for CSOs engaging adolescents in VAWG prevention reveal that prevention programming should be anchored in adolescent girls' own sense of safety and that the perception of adolescent girls' safety should be the starting point of intervention. This can be done through an initial analysis of perceptions of the safety of girls and key stakeholders around them.

In addition, it was critical to work on two tracks: first, carving out girls-only safe spaces, and second, reclaiming existing gendered public and private spaces that feel unsafe to girls.

"It was only after beginning the intervention, did I realize how much girls live with the constant fear of getting raped, whether in schools or on their way in and out of schools, in their homes, in public spaces --everywhere" (FGD, 5 March 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Ensuring that training methodologies are diverse and age-appropriate, and that training is frequent

In terms of how CSOs tailored programming to adolescents' diverse needs, lessons emerging highlight that constant adaptation of the prevention training methodology requires the skills of front-line change agents and is key to meeting adolescent girls "where they are" – that is, considering their immediate circumstances, ages, schedules, and safe spaces.

Practitioner insights also highlighted the need for initial pilots and small-scale testing. To do this, deeper engagements and more frequent interactions are essential for moving beyond awareness to achieve behavioral outcomes. For example, in Serbia the majority of adolescent girls and boys participating in the Autonomous Women's Center project assessed the online and offline activities as interesting and adapted to their generation. However, the project team, peer educators and even adolescents remarked that follow-up after training should be more thorough and continuous.

Also, to allow for mistakes and course correction, "breathing space" should be included in curricula and training methodologies/plans.

Mobilizing agents of change among and around adolescent girls

Lessons emerging on how CSOs have engaged agents of change around adolescents to enable VAWG prevention show that agents of change among adolescent girls are needed, and adolescent girl-led programmes are promising. Practitioners highlight the ability of girl-led programming to inspire and encourage innovation.

"...that girls involved in work with their peers on issues of violence against girls have several advantages in comparison with teachers and parents. Young people have similar values, understand teenagers they communicate with. Teenagers show a high level of trust to their peers; they are equal in relations and have similar inner worlds and experiences..." (UWF, annual report, year 1)

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Besides, promoting adolescents as leaders and promoting youth–adult partnerships need more careful testing and documentation to find effective approaches.

Designing prevention interventions for adolescents in resource-constrained environments where there is an absence of youth-friendly services, laws and policies

As for how CSOs design prevention programmes where there is an absence of youth-friendly services, findings show that **developing a standard for helping young victims of violence is beneficial in designing VAWG prevention programming**. It gives young activists a voice and a seat at the table to push for more adolescent-friendly services.

Lessons also show that it is critical to collaborate with other organizations to create an enabling environment for adolescent-friendly services by advocating for policies, budgets, frameworks, and the implementation of laws to ensure that violence against adolescent girls, particularly those at risk, does not fall through the cracks.

Creating gender-transformative programming to increase the influence and impact of youth activism.

Findings on how CSOs have promoted gender-transformative strategies to prevent VAWG reveal that initiating multilevel and gender-transformative change requires partnership across multiple types of organizations to find the most meaningful and sustainable ways of preventing VAWG. For example, WROs and youth organizations worked to create narratives that were locally grounded and resonated with local actors, rather than being seen as coming from the outside. In Vietnam, Plan International, similarly to other INGOs felt that they had a strong role to play in getting government buy-in:

"When we were speaking to the [Department of Education and Training] in Hanoi, we brought evidence on prevalence of GBV not in Hanoi only – so that they don't think they are the only ones. Plan International had simultaneously conducted research in four other countries, so we shared this data with them. We re-emphasized that this an issue that's faced even by developed countries. And this helped convince the government that they are not alone in this fight."

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

In addition, developing adaptive learning systems is essential for projects working on gender-transformative change and system change with multiple actors.

Also, changes that quickly disrupt the status quo can be high risk for adolescent girls. For this reason, they should be identified and planned for at the design stage, in consultation and partnership with adolescents.

To read more on this theme, access Majumdar, S. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Adolescent Focused Approaches to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/learning-from-practice-adolescent-focused-approaches-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.7 Resistance and backlash

In the course of their prevention work, CSOs face numerous contextual challenges and resistance at multiple levels. The most common resistance identified by practitioners in their day-to-day experiences working in the prevention space, as noted in the knowledge brief *Learning from Practice: Resistance and Backlash to Preventing Violence against Women and Girls (Viswanathan, R., 2021)*, include institutional inertia, denial of support for feminist work, pushback on what are considered progressive feminist agenda, attacks on civil society spaces, or even the re-emergence of resistance because of shifting political **agendas**. The review presents CSOs' learning from practice on how they dealt with resistance in their specific contexts and interventions.

Some of the strategies organizations use to mitigate resistance, include:

- advocating publicly to secure the support of the public to advance specific approaches, advocate for laws and policies, and limit resistance from within institutions.
- adopting feminist approaches that mobilize and empower women to challenge power and inequality.
- mobilizing communities to unpack and dismantle resistance within communities.
- using framing strategies – that is, shaping narratives in ways that make them contextually relevant and persuasive and allow them to make connections with stakeholders.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

During the study, findings and knowledge derived from practitioners' experiences with resistance emerged inductively and are divided into two broad categories: passive forms of resistance - omission, denial, disavowal, and inaction – and more active forms of resistance - appeasement, appropriation and co-option, political backlash and backsliding, and repression.

The broad categories are derived from the Flood et al. (2020) framework, which maps the various types of resistance to gender equality across a spectrum ranging from passive denial to aggressive action to maintain the status quo. It also enables one to understand the various types of resistance that grantee organizations encountered during project implementation. They classify backlash into eight categories: denial, disavowal, inaction, appeasement, appropriation, co-option, repression, and violence. At the passive end of the spectrum, a ninth form – "omission" - was included because it emerged as a form of resistance in some of the interventions included in the review.[12]

FIGURE 7: Missing

A useful framework maps the different types of resistance to gender equality across a spectrum that ranges from passive denial to aggressive action to preserve the status quo .

Types of resistance to gender equality, adapted from Flood et al. (2020).

Omission. The exclusion of VAWG and the experiences of women and girls, for example from laws and policies.

Denial. Denying that VAWG is an issue.

Disavowal. Abdicating responsibility for taking action around VAWG.

Inaction. Lack of action against VAWG.

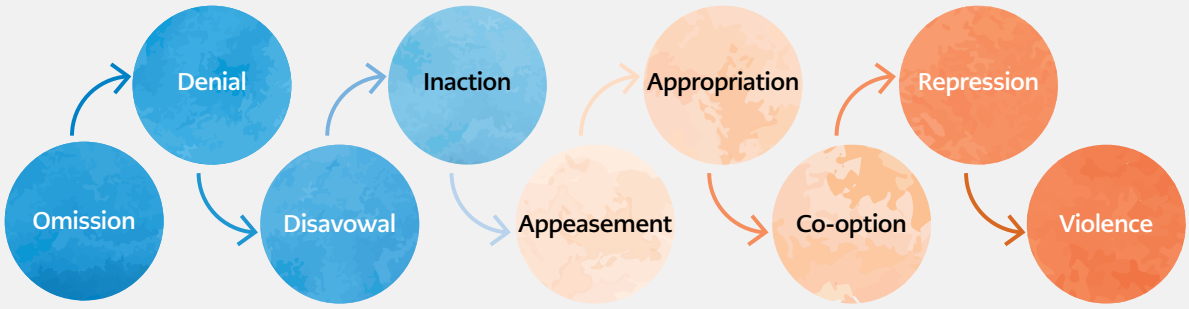
Appeasement. Appeasing those working to dismantle gender-based violence (GBV) or VAWG in order to limit their impact.

Appropriation. Overtly advocating against VAWG but covertly attempting to undermine it.

Co-option. Using progressive feminist language to preserve the status quo.

Repression. Suppressing change initiatives to dismantle them.

Violence. Using violence to harass and subjugate groups at risk of VAWG or working to end VAWG.



12 To read more on the conceptual framework see, Flood, M., Dragiewicz, M. and Pease, B. (2020), "Resistance and backlash to gender equality", Australian Journal of Social Issues, vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 1–16.

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Passive resistance: omission, denial, disavowal, and inaction

When confronted with omissions and exclusions of instances of VAWG, CSOs highlighted that it is important to secure support from the public to advance specific approaches, advocate for laws and policies, and limit resistance from within institutions.

In addition, it is critical to empower women to own their experiences and share them through storytelling and use strong community mobilization to combat patriarchal structures, champion gender equality, and prevent further violence in their communities.

Community mobilization strategies such as developing cadres of community facilitators to identifying key allies within communities to unpack and dismantle resistance is found by CSOs to be a powerful strategy to mitigate systemic resistance, especially denial from within communities.

To tackle the exclusion of women and girls in the society, practitioners found that it was important for women and girls to be provided official documentations such as identity cards, birth, and marriage certificates as a strategy to tackle omission.

In terms of dealing with denials, lessons emerging highlight that CSOs should know how to present narratives to the community and how to engage with the subject matter, as presenting VAWG in less threatening ways is better received than more radical narratives. The way in which violence prevention is framed can influence how communities receive and act on information. Practitioners found that when engaging communities in conversations about prevention, it was more effective to identify entry points that were appropriate to the context and framed in a way that allowed for dialogue without being confrontational, even with more conservative members of the community. For example, Arab Women's Organization from Jordan found that reframing the gender argument as an economic one was an effective way to engage male members of the communities they worked in.

Also, those who are resistant to change are more likely to accept gender-equal narratives, language, symbolism, and elements.

Besides, deep grassroots and community mobilization strategies, such as framing dialogues to build bridges with communities, working within communities, identifying allies, and partnering with key stakeholders, help mitigate community resistance.

Lessons emerging on disavowal and inaction highlight that it is beneficial for prevention if CSOs act as interlocuters between institutions or tertiary prevention services (e.g., law enforcement, the justice system or social welfare centres) and survivors of violence.

Besides, potential structural gaps and mechanisms to fix them should be identified, while holding institutions and individuals accountable.

In addition, gaps and weaknesses in prevention and response ecosystem should be identified and risk mitigation strategies should be developed to respond to disavowal and inaction in the short term, as well as advocating for long-term changes and improvements. For example, MADRE from Nicaragua realized that having a very detailed but flexible plan that anticipated unexpected or negative risks or outcomes was critical. MADRE representatives reported that they were very "concrete about what they were going for", and planned ways to mitigate in a step-by-step manner any eventualities. Being flexible and adaptable emerged as important attributes for the organizations and their interventions.

"If the other person said, "Oh I called the police, and the police didn't have enough gas in their boat to go to the community." … they [the women] would say, "We'll provide the gas." Or sometimes the project would cover the costs of transportation of the police to go and get the perpetrator right in that community. This allowed us to be consistent" (MADRE, interview, May 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Active resistance: appeasement, appropriation, co-option, repression, and backlash

In terms of appeasement, findings inform that CSOs should identify where and how leaders' support will be forthcoming, and to what extent, when designing interventions to understand and plan for resistance.

Furthermore, findings on appropriation and co-option inform that to protect the intervention, the organization and their staff in difficult sociopolitical contexts, risk mitigation exercises and strong risk mitigation strategies should be carried out. Moreover, CSOs working in conflictual sociopolitical contexts must constantly evaluate their positions and (re)frame their claims and responses, continuously anticipating and responding to opposing stakeholders. For example, Society Without Violence in Armenia, did its work at a time when there was a lot of discussion about gender in society. It received a lot of criticism because it was a big part of the women's movement. They also did a risk assessment and decided on a way to promote its agenda while limiting the public's exposure to nationalist rhetoric. This was done to lessen the effect of the polarized environment on its intervention. The practitioners stated that it planned to strengthen its partnership with the relevant educational authorities (by working closely with decision makers and building relationships with key stakeholders) and make public the government's commitments to the national action plan to make sure that it would be carried out on time.

"One of the biggest lessons learnt is to always be ready for negotiations and to always have a good number of arguments and necessary documents proving our opinion and claiming our rights. We adopted a negotiation strategy to bring the international obligations of the State as the main argument … in order to achieve strong collaboration, we used the tactic of giving them a choice for either a close cooperation or us referring to all the gaps and reluctance of the government to cooperate in the civil society reports of the CEDAW [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women] and UPR [Universal Periodic Review]"(SWV, annual report, p. 52)

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Lessons emerging on political backlash reveal that VAWG prevention programming should incorporate risk mitigation strategies and conduct resilience evaluations to prevent sudden disruption to their activities.

Besides, practitioners should build grassroots and civil society partnerships to support them to navigate through periods of backlash.

Findings show that in response to repressive conditions, organizations should restructure their interventions to be more robust and less reliant on the government by strengthening relationships with local partners and communities instead.

Power is central to how vulnerable groups are targeted in repressive contexts; therefore, CSOs and practitioners should not view institutions as homogeneous entities because they are made up of microunits and communities that are socialized by their working conditions, which vary greatly from the officer on the ground to the official at the top. As a result, consistent engagement with all levels of the system is required.

CHALLENGES

Grantees identified financial difficulties and time constraints as major challenges confronting their interventions when dealing with resistance and backlash. In Pakistan, for example, ROZAN frequently encountered resistance and financial difficulties as a result of the government's restrictions on receiving funding for women's rights interventions.

The work of grantee organizations was constrained by financial limitations. Fundraising to close the financial gaps in programming proved to be difficult because resistance sometimes calls for a more immediate and direct response to support people who are facing violence.

Furthermore, finding time for reflection within the constrained time frames for project implementation was difficult, according to grantee organizations as reflecting on the nature of resistance is not something that is easily achieved within a short time frame.

To overcome some of the challenges faced during their interventions, grantees sought the support of international donors to back projects financially and address major challenges confronting their interventions when dealing with resistance and backlash.

Many organizations used education and economic empowerment to engage with communities. These strategies created dialogue with stakeholders to mitigate resistance and backlash.

In addition, grantees stressed that solidarity among organizations was critical in responding to resistance. Coming together as a network of organizations doing the same work helped reduce stress and the burden of work in responding to resistance.

To read more on this theme, access Viswanathan, R. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Resistance and Backlash to Preventing Violence against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/12/learning-from-practice-resistance-and-backlash-to-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.8 Adaptive programming

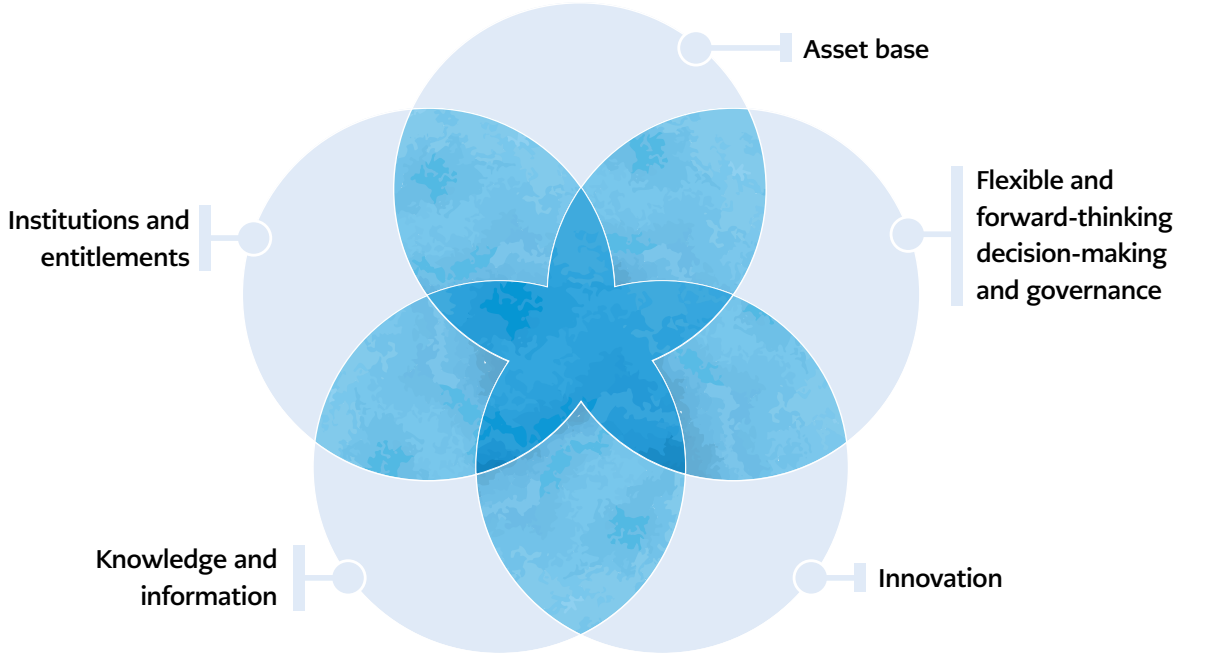
Programming to prevent VAWG must regularly adapt owing to a range of factors, from the diverse needs and experiences of project beneficiaries and stakeholders to environmental and political factors, and health emergencies, such as COVID-19 pandemic. Projects funded by the UN Trust Fund face the uncertain and context-specific nature of social change. They collaborate with funders and partners who have distinct bureaucracies, and they work with marginalized communities particularly vulnerable to natural disasters, disease, conflict, and economic shocks. Adaptive programming ensures that these projects take a flexible approach to VAWG prevention based on the needs of their communities.

Findings from the *Learning from Practice: Adaptive Programming to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls (Stern, E., 2021)*, reveal important insights on why and how VAWG prevention programmes adapt to changing contexts and circumstances.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Findings of the review are organized based on the framework by the Overseas Development Institute,[13] which unpacks how projects adapted. It identifies five characteristics of adaptive capacity at the local level that are shared by most contexts: (1) knowledge and information; (2) assets base; (3) institutions and entitlements; (4) innovation and creativity; (5) flexible governance and risk management.

FIGURE 8: Missing



LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Why VAWG prevention programmes adapt

Projects adapt to VAWG prevention programmes due to various reasons. Grantees funded by the UN Trust Fund highlighted several reasons, including environmental threats and events (e.g., floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes). For example, Women's Justice Initiative in Guatemala noted that heavy rains affected the legal literacy courses they were offering beneficiaries. This made them reduce the time for learning to enable participants to be able to return home and also not to prevent women from participating.

Many other practitioners highlighted political instability of their contexts as reasons why they had to adapt their programming. These instabilities include military wars, gang conflicts, state violence and political uprisings. For example, in Haiti, civil unrest prevented beneficiaries from participating in project activities. Beyond Borders

13 See Stern, E. (2021), "Adaptive programming to prevent violence against women and girls: lessons from civil society organizations funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women", Learning from Practice Brief Series, Issue No. 8 (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women).

staff used technology to communicate with its networks and maintain relationships, and activities were re-scheduled to ensure the safety of staff and participants travelling to participate.

COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions imposed by governments challenged grantees for them to adapt their programming. Grantees adapted by pivoting from in-person to virtual formats, because of COVID-19-related restrictions on gathering and social distancing requirements.

Other factors that necessitated adaptation include internal factors such as capacity needs of organizational partners, staff and key stakeholders. Several working stakeholders commonly prompted adaptation, to meet their various needs. Other practitioners had to adapt their projects because they did not reach participants as intended, because of barriers to engagement or challenges in sustaining involvement over time.

How VAWG prevention programmes adapt

Lessons from the PBK on knowledge and information indicate that adaptive programming on VAWG necessitates strong monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) systems to identify and adapt to ongoing challenges and changes, including tracking for whom a project works effectively.

Furthermore, data must be collected throughout the implementation process, not just during the design phase, to inform adaptation, including through regular consultation with stakeholders and participants.

It is also critical to build strong relationships with communities to support adaptive capacity.

According to findings on asset base, access to flexible and core funding is critical for adaptative programming. Furthermore, access to and control over assets necessitate flexible funding models that allow for the revision of project budgets, indicators, and objectives in response to changes in design, including after inception, or in response to changing circumstances. In Chile, SUR Corporación de Estudios Sociales y Educación emphasized the importance of open and regular dialogue between grantees and funders:

> *"It is good to ensure there is flexibility in funding if something unexpected comes up like a pandemic, flooding or [an] earthquake, which happens a lot in our country. Political and authoritarian issues also appear. Having dialogue with the funder is very important in order to adapt and change" (FGD participant, 4 May 2021).*

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

In addition, donors struck a balance between flexibility and accountability, providing grantees with flexible reporting timelines as well as project implementation extensions. This was accomplished by holding regular conversations to promote transparency and understanding of the challenges that projects face, both internally and externally.

On institutions and entitlements, emerging lessons indicate that it is critical to assess and respond to the capacity needs of key stakeholders and participants to foster institutional resilience.

VAWG prevention programmes must often be flexible regarding the stakeholders and/or institutions they target and how they target them, which can require significant readjustments to organizational approaches or operational processes.

Furthermore, to be adaptive, institutions should ensure people's entitlement and empowerment so that individuals and groups have the right to be heard and responded to.

The COVID-19 pandemic hampered VAWG prevention programming; however, the pandemic also fueled innovation and creativity, which supported adaptive VAWG prevention programming.

Lessons learned suggest that it is critical to strengthen remote programming, as well as build stronger capacities for remote programming support readiness and risk mitigation.

Organizations should also modify their interventions to emphasize self-care and well-being, such as assisting staff and community members in protecting themselves from COVID-19 and meeting their basic needs. For example, Physicians for Human Rights, a grantee in the Democratic Republic of the Congo identified the importance of self-care activities, especially for health professionals:

"One thing we saw to be increasingly important was training on self-care and resilience and creating space for service providers and professionals to debrief and decompress. This work is tough on us and on service providers, and that became a lot of the focus of our work" (FGD participant, 4 May 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

In terms of flexible governance and risk management, emerging lessons show that it is critical for practitioners to conduct a long-term analysis to identify mechanisms and risk factors that may affect their work and to develop appropriate risk mitigation responses for when emergencies or threats occur, and that forward-looking risk mitigation is a critical component of adaptive capacity.

Furthermore, it is critical to prioritize staff and participant safety as well as flexible decision-making. To ensure participatory decision-making and responsive programming, organizations should have embedded and respectful relationships with communities.

Adolescent girls take a peek at a women's rights workshop.

© Lisa Shannon/Women's Justice Initiative

CHALLENGES

Many practitioners highlighted the challenges involved in moving projects to remote or virtual formats. Although organisations may have the capacity or technology to move virtual, it left out a lot of beneficiaries who could not afford or have the right equipment to attend virtual activities.Moreover, the implementation of prevention activities was difficult in virtual spaces.

Another challenge that hindered the capacity of grantees to adapt and pivot in response to changing circumstances, although these actors are well placed to know when and how to adapt, is financial constraints, especially non-flexible funding.

To overcome the above challenges to adaptive programming, grantees highlight that their ability to adapt programming is enhanced by donors finding a balance between flexibility and accountability and ensuring regular dialogue between donors and grantees to promote donors' transparency and comprehension of the internal and external challenges that projects face.

Furthermore, given their access to knowledge and information, as well as their ability and agility to pivot programming, grantees were in a good position to adapt to meet COVID-19-related needs and address key risk factors for VAWG during the pandemic.

To read more on this theme, access Stern, E. (2021), "Learning from Practice: Adaptive Programming to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/12/learning-from-practice-adaptive-programming-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.9 Survivor-centred, multisectoral service provision

Researchers and academics have discussed the importance of being survivor-centred in VAWG prevention programming. In this series, *Learning from Practice: Survivor-centred, Multisectoral Service Provision to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls (Le Roux, E.,2022)* engages with the praxis and frameworks which posit that **good-quality services delivered in ways that respect women and their rights can reduce risk factors for VAWG and support factors that protect against VAWG, and that such services can also assist in the early identification of violence and reduce its reoccurrence.** This is explored through the lens of civil society organizations (CSOs), learning from 11 projects implemented by 8 CSOs.

For the eight civil society organizations featured in this brief, project interventions not only aimed to improve, provide and bolster services but also did so in a way that was survivor-centred and relied on multisectoral collaboration. And, for each, ensuring the delivery of one or more services to survivors constituted most of their programmatic activities.

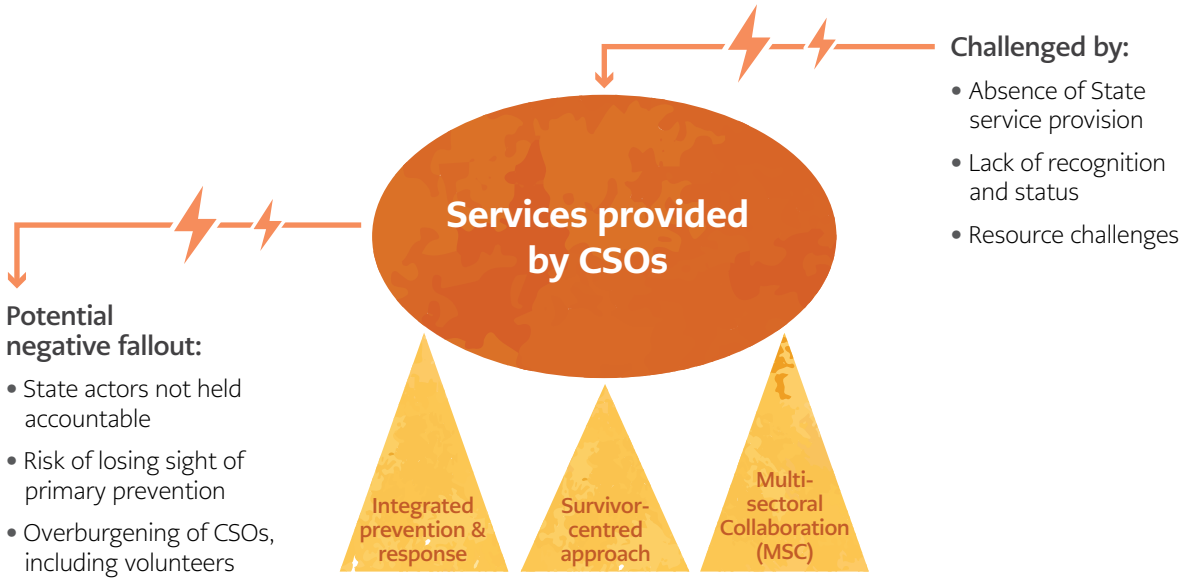
Service provision may be described in different ways. We recognize that states are obligated to lead and deliver essential services for survivors, but in the context of this study and with the focus on practice-based knowledge, the CSO/WROs in this synthesis review used a range of terms in three languages to refer to the services they provide to survivors, including "support services", "follow-up services", "EVAW (Ending violence against women) services" and "GBV (gender-based violence)-related services". So, it is important to note that there is not one general term used by the civil society organizations featured in this brief that this synthesis review can use. Therefore, the term "essential services" is avoided in this synthesis review, to prevent the reader from misconstruing which

services are referred to. The practice-based knowledge synthesis offers an opportunity to understand the complex relationship between general services (those offered by public authorities such as social services, health services, [and] employment services, which provide long-term help and are not exclusively designed for the benefit of victims only but serve the public at large) and specialist services (those designed to meet the specific needs of survivors, and are not available to the general public), as well as who provides which type of service.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Developed as a tool to increase understanding of CSO service provision and a frame for the findings discussed in the brief, the below conceptual framework illustrates the balance of key elements of design and implementation of services for survivors of VAWG, including challenges (on the right), which may lead to negative consequences (on the left).

FIGURE 9: Key elements of service provision by CSOs for survivors of VAWG, with challenges and potential negative consequences



LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

On the fluidity of the link between prevention and response, lessons emerging highlight that working with and for survivors is an important element of prevention, and that activities typically associated with primary prevention are also a crucial element of response because prevention and response are viewed as mutually reinforcing.

Besides, findings show that it is important for programming to consider activities focused on prevention in serving survivors and that prevention and response as an integrated whole should be clear in the design of prevention programming.

I feel like prevention is a really big piece … [But] you cannot do this in a vacuum, because most of the time the violence is never reported. Women in developing and middle-income countries don't report sexual violence, so there has to be a contingency plan to respond to that [reality]. So I feel like it's really great to focus on prevention because that prevents the problem from happening in the first place … But there is still a need to have a really robust plan to respond to this violence as well. (Focus-group discussion, 15 November 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Findings on survivor-centred approaches to VAWG prevention indicate that VAWG prevention programming should be survivor-centred, as survivors provide critical experiences and insights that should also guide primary prevention.

Survivor-centredness is not just a goal to strive for, but rather a continuous process or journey. As a result, CSOs must constantly evolve to make their programming more survivor-centred.

Furthermore, projects are more likely to be comprehensively survivor-centred if survivors are included as partners in adaptable project design and implementation.

I think there's an ambition to be survivor-centred, especially in the provision of services … [But] what does that actually mean? [So people say] I serve survivors, therefore [the project is] survivor-centred. But actually [survivors] have played no role in designing the project and are not playing an active role in decision-making … I think we try to be survivor-centred … but there's a long way to go to actually make that meaningful (Focus group discussion, 15 November 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Lessons from the wide range and impact of civil society organization services show that in ensuring that survivors receive the services they require, the distinction between general and specialized services becomes more complicated.

In resource-constrained settings, CSOs should avoid attempting extensive, holistic, integrated service delivery because they will be pulled in two competing directions in terms of service delivery, i.e. focus on a small number of services and do them well while accepting that other needs of survivors will not be met, or attempt to meet all the needs of survivors needs, but at the risk of the services not being adequate. However, there is a need for integrated services in fragile and resource-constrained settings.

All of the projects in this sample were designed to fill gaps in, build the capacity of, or bolster existing services. In Serbia for example, B92 Fund piloted an economic empowerment model for survivors at an existing government safe house because these safe houses did not previously offer economic empowerment opportunities despite the crucial role that they would play to support survivors.

In two rural areas of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Panzi Foundation piloted one-stop centres – an example of stepping in by implementing a project meant to provide services or ensure adequate service delivery.

However, CSOs that work directly with survivors face challenges when they are unable to provide all the services that a survivor requires. In this regard, partnership with other regional or national counterparts is essential for integrated prevention and response, as in some contexts State service providers may be absent or may not have the capacity to provide comprehensive medical care or psychosocial support.

Lessons learned from the role of civil society organizations in multisectoral collaboration show that CSOs are not always simply partners within the multisectoral collaborations structures created by other stakeholders. Rather, they frequently initiate, coordinate, and lead multisectoral collaborations.

Moreover, findings show that treating prevention and services as distinct categories creates a false dichotomy.

Lessons show that CSO collaborations can cross multiple sectoral boundaries, and that activities frequently integrate prevention and services, with mutual strengthening mechanisms.

It is also critical to include and mobilize institutions in collaborative efforts, as individuals involved in multisectoral collaborations may face resistance from their own institutions if they engage in and prioritize multisectoral collaborations.

To read more on this theme, access Le Roux, E. (2022), "Learning from Practice: Survivor-centred, Multisectoral Service Provision to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/learning-from-practice-survivor-centred-multisectoral-service-provision-as-part-of-prevention-of-violence-against-women-and-girls

3.10 Strengthening a legal and policy environment

Although preventing VAWG has long been recognized as having societal and institutional dimensions, as well as individual-, family- and community- level aspects, **working together as CSOs to develop multisectoral collaboration around law and policy reforms and their implementation was identified as a promising trend** in a review of the UN Trust Fund grantees' work.

Learning from Practice: Strengthening a legal and policy environment to prevent violence against women (Palm, S, 2022) focuses on 10 diverse projects implemented by 9 CSOs that received funding from the UN Trust Fund to address a gap identified in the current literature, namely research theorizing about and aiming to better understand **how** civil society organizations contribute in different contexts to legal and policy systems change and **why** these roles are critical to strengthening an enabling environment for VAWG prevention.

The brief highlights the important roles that the different types of CSOs in the sample play in engaging with formal and informal legal and policy systems and the ways in which these organizations seek to navigate the complexities of engaging with these systems.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In a framework developed by the author and informed by the RESPECT Women[14] framework, we find a lens and a tool to illustrate how CSOs in the sample play a range of roles in strengthening an enabling environment for VAWG prevention through engaging with law and policy reforms and their implementation at several stages. It depicts a four-faceted wheel that shows how the nine CSOs worked on different elements of law and policy reforms and their implementation, to contribute to VAWG prevention. Some CSOs may focus their attention on only one or two aspects, but this brief suggests that CSOs can make important contributions across all four facets.

FIGURE 10: Strengthening an enabling environment for VAWG prevention – entry points for civil society engagement

14 WHO (World Health Organization) (2019), "RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence against Women" (Geneva, WHO).

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

Advocating and evidence building for law and policy reforms

Advocacy has emerged as a major area of focus for law and policy reforms amongst CSOs. As they are rarely able to make laws or policy directly, community-driven advocacy for law and policy reform is a unique contribution that requires listening, convening and sharing with multiple and diverse stakeholders. For some, **evidence building is important to building a case for changes to law and policy.** For example, Pragya in India and Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz in El Salvador both worked to develop VAWG observatories as centralized data collection repositories which were updated regularly and collaboratively. This enabled the utilization of data for ongoing monitoring of state policies to ensure that they were in line with new VAWG laws.

Strong laws and government policies for VAWG prevention that offer a comprehensive framework, harmonize civil and criminal laws, and are proactive and binding on policy actors and statutory duty bearers, are essential. CSOs play important roles, including:

- Advocacy and evidence building that are community-driven
- Partnering for a shared advocacy agenda
- Centralizing the voices and participation of women

In Zimbabwe for example, Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe demonstrates that effective work towards law and policy reforms can emerge. They identified its decision to work at multiple levels of systems in its context for law and policy reforms as effective because of its targeted intersectional approach, i.e. an explicit focus on girls and women living with disabilities in rural communities. Their intervention approach included contributions to national government plans while also advocating for and successfully influencing the incorporation of VAWG prevention in new forms of legislation and policies – especifically on disability and mental health.

Building the capacity of judicial, law enforcement and government institutions

Formal duty bearers, such as the police and judicial and government ministry personnel, need to be equipped to effectively implement existing and new laws and policies around VAWG prevention. CSOs play important roles, including:

- Delivering a range of capacity development activities
- Shifting mindsets of institutions to address VAWG in less reactive and more proactive, preventative ways
- Positive collaboration and multisectoral partnerships

Whether we are working on VAWG prevention or providing VAWG services, the multi-sector, multi-pronged approach works best because even for [the] government there are lots of departments, including health, police, education [and] livelihood. So every department is involved in some way, and everyone has different roles [and] different budgets available. So we need to see how they converge and work with everyone – a holistic intervention. (FGD, 22 November 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Bridging gaps between formal laws/policies and informal systems at community level

Informal and customary systems often play roles in adjudicating legal and policy issues at community level and reinforcing social norms, both positive and negative, in ways that shape many women's lives. CSOs play important roles, including:

- Making these systems more women-centred and survivor-friendly
- Reshaping the community-level understanding of women's and girls' rights
- Bridging gaps with formal systems
- Enabling more women to participate in informal and formal systems

A multisectoral approach is very critical and a bottom-up approach to involve communities themselves because if we are coming to say that your customary practices are harmful, you need a strategy in how you can involve them in trying to move them away from what they've practised over years. It needs to be coming from the bottom up not like you're just coming from town … involve them gradually until you change their mindsets. (FGD, 22 November 2021).

Extracted from the knowledge brief.

Improving access to justice for VAWG survivors and mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable

Women face both individual (e.g. awareness, transportation or communication challenges) and structural (e.g. discriminatory laws, transitional justice spaces, institutional capacities) barriers to accessing justice, and this creates a risk of further violence. Systems-level VAWG prevention seeks to address patterns that result in continual cycles of VAWG in the lives of women and societies. CSOs play important roles, including:

- Supporting survivors to access justice
- Strengthening systems to hold perpetrators accountable, especially in transitional justice or conflict-affected settings

In Timor-Leste for example, Associacaon Chega Ba Ita utilized participatory action research and worked with survivors of conflict related to VAWG to advocate to the highest levels of international legal and government systems for survivors' needs for justice, including reparation and support.

To read more on this theme, access Palm, S. (2022), "Learning from Practice: Strengthening a legal and policy environment to prevent violence against women and girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/06/learning-from-practice-strengthening-a-legal-and-policy-environment-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls

BOX 1: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the prevention of VAWG[15]

The UN Trust Fund identified lessons across the series on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and adaptations to prevention programmes made by the civil society organizations involved in the knowledge production in this Synthesis Review Series. While each of the 10 reviews includes analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 in relation to the thematic findings, lessons have been collated, synthesized, and published in a **Special Edition** which draws on the experiences of 20+ civil society organizations. The review identified **four key areas of learning**:

1. **The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working with women and girls for VAWG prevention**
   - COVID-19 made situations for vulnerable groups worse, by deepening marginalization and invisibility, adding new risks and creating additional barriers to accessing services for women and girls. It also highlighted barriers that already existed for many at-risk women and girls.
   - School closures were identified in multiple regions as an issue for those working with girls.
   - Given the link between food and economic insecurity and violence at household level, providing food and emergency materials was seen by practitioners as a VAWG prevention activity.
   - Several projects activated an existing front line – such as a cadre of women who had been mobilized and trained to be leaders in their community – to continue prevention activities; they played an effective leadership role.
2. **The impact on mobilizing communities for VAWG prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic**
   - Most practitioners pointed to the importance of VAWG prevention programming meeting the needs not only of women and girls but also of their communities in the pandemic.
   - Community mobilization programmes had to radically adapt – their media, messages, and number of participants, among other things – and several became hyper-localized.
   - Supporting communities during challenging times built deeper relationships and trust.
3. **Mobilizing legal systems and essential services for VAWG prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic**
   - COVID-19 made the work of CSOs on service provision and legal and policy reform and implementation far harder, as systems were overwhelmed with new requirements.
   - CSOs developed several plans and strategies to ensure that they could continue rolling out their VAWG prevention and response activities, as well as ensuring multi-stakeholder collaboration, which strengthened relationships.
   - A capacity-building perspective in working with governments can enable CSOs to bridge gaps between formal services and grass-roots realities and show the value of a holistic approach.
   - CSOs noted that in some contexts VAWG prevention and response was not recognised as an essential service.

15 The key take-aways outlined in Box 1 have been extracted from the knowledge brief. To read more on this theme, access Majumdar, S. (2022), "Learning from Practice: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls" (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women). Available online at: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/02/learning-from-practice-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-prevention-of-violence-against-women-and-girls

4. **Building organizational resilience and adapting prevention programming during the COVID-19 pandemic**
   - Despite the many challenges it posed for VAWG prevention programming, the pandemic fuelled innovation, creativity and opportunities, including new models of collaboration.
   - The most common adaptation across all programmes was to digital tools, which had pros and cons. They may further exclude those without access, prevent multi-level dialogue and create safety and confidentiality issues. However, they may offer opportunities, especially for marginalized women to overcome in-person gendered power dynamics.
   - Increased digitalization at systems level and the development of policies around this will be important to ensure that CSOs and wider networks stay connected. Patterns of collaboration are at risk of unravelling in the long term under social distancing rules.
   - Adaptations were necessary for the pandemic, but also useful for other types of present and future crises, and lessons learned in previous crises were useful in the pandemic.
   - Almost all practitioners focused more in their interventions on self-care and well-being.

Courtesy of Grassroot soccer.

© Grassroot soccer

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FEEDBACK ACROSS THE SERIES

At the outset of this journey, the UN Trust Fund aimed to systematically extract lessons from its archives and generate insights and co-create knowledge on VAW prevention programming across a variety of projects with CSOs engaging with stakeholders and duty bearers. The UN Trust Fund collaborated with former and current grantees to co-create knowledge briefs on key themes of VAWG prevention programming across the 'Pathways to Prevention' journey. Throughout the Prevention Series process, the aim was to ensure that stakeholders in the field of prevention programming were engaged in an inclusive and participatory manner.

In order to get feedback on both the process and outcome of co-producing the series, and on the utilization and uptake of the knowledge generated across the briefs, the UN Trust Fund sought feedback through a survey sent to over 3000 registrants and participants of the webinars and through its annual grantee and partner survey. The former was intended to inform next steps on the Prevention Series, as well as plans to systematically review and synthesize knowledge during our 2021-2025 Strategic Plan Period. In terms of informing policy, programming, advocacy, and practice of their organizations, 89% of the respondents of the survey reported that the series of knowledge products on prevention was useful for their roles. According to respondents, the contributions of the series allowed them to discuss the varying contexts, difficulties, intervention strategies, and opportunities around the world and exchange lessons and experiences with one another. In addition, it successfully raised awareness and improved their understanding on how other practitioners are developing effective interventions for preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in their communities and beyond.

"The learning informed my organization's programming and advocacy strategies." (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

"We have stored the learning resources for day-to-day reference and for future reference to inform our policy, programming, advocacy and practice." (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

"The TF sits on a wealth of knowledge collected over years. It is fantastic that this knowledge is being consolidated, summarized, packaged and disseminated to inform the broader 'evidence-base' of what works, and lessons learned in implementation." (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

Furthermore, 84% of the respondents found the series of knowledge products on prevention inclusive and accessible in terms of languages (interpretation/translation) offered, diverse representation of participants, and special arrangements for those living with disabilities.

"I really liked the translation into different languages because this made it easier for all participants to learn without barriers." (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

"It was an inclusive webinar in the sense that it adapted the approach of leaving no one behind, participants cut across all sectors and regions." (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

The feedback also highlighted the importance of UN Trust Fund knowledge products, learnings, and webinars, especially in the context of COVID-19 where physical engagements were limited due to the risks associated with the pandemic. Topics/theme that respondents would like to see future knowledge products produced on include:

- Women's Movement Building to End Violence against Women
- Contribution of Small Grassroots CSOs/WROs to EVAW
- Advocacy on Laws, Policies and Reform by CSOs/WROs
- Self-Care and Collective Care in the field of EVAW
- Multisectoral and Survivor-Centred Services by CSOs/WROs
- Multisectoral approach to addressing climate change and migration related GBV.
- Prevention of VAW in disaster risk reduction (DRR) context.
- Empowering informal workers for VAW prevention.
- Gender violence in Academia.
- Faith leaders in multisectoral and survivor-centred services.
- Involving leadership/local authorities in the eradication of violence against women
- Raising funds and forming alliances to support efforts to end violence against women.
- Religious leaders in multisectoral and survivors-focused services
- EVAW and property rights

Additionally, respondents reported that Webinars (74%), Summaries (57%), and Infographics (46%) were their preferred formats for engaging with future knowledge generated and produced by the UN Trust Fund. Respondents also encouraged the Trust Fund to produce materials that are in more simplified formats as well and to consider creating more time and space for dialogue and discussions, which was considered the most dynamic and useful part of the process. It reiterates that practice-based knowledge is not a static picture or an objective product but rather a way of doing, a process of critical reflection. It also focused attention on place-based practice for VAWG prevention, which is embedded in a context, and not just generalizable, although as came out during consultations and feedback, many of its lessons did resonate with other places and contexts.

"Produce knowledge materials in simplified format, most of the products are usually bulky." (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

"The process you all used was interesting and inspiring, and the knowledge briefs in particular have been quite useful in our work! Thank you!" (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

Father Support Program Implementation

© Olcayto Ezgin/ACEV

"Thank you for providing these important knowledge/capacity-building products for us. Our team has certainly benefited." (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

"Follow up sessions on most of the themes is required because the one and half hours that is normally allocated for webinars is not enough to discuss and share" (Respondent of the Prevention Series feedback survey, 2022)

This three-year journey is a first step in the UN Trust Fund's exploration of how PBK collection, synthesis, dissemination and application can and could feature in an ongoing way within the UN Trust Fund's MEAL systems and as part of its future strategy for the Learning Hub. As the UN Trust Fund reflects on the lessons from this series, it remains committed to ensuring that its learning journeys continue to be grounded in mutual enablement, inclusion and participation and honor practitioners' lived experiences and knowledge.

In terms of recommendations and the way forward, practitioners across the series have made a wide range of recommendations for each pathway. In addition, there are a set of recommendations that are emerging as cross-cutting: on a) flexible funding, b) co-creation and collaboration, c) learning iteratively, d) thinking power structures and e) managing risks when it comes to VAW/G prevention. Below are the consolidated recommendations from across the prevention briefs from practitioners on each of these five areas of work.

Recommendations from Practitioners: On the Need for **Long Term, Flexible and Core Funding** for CSOs/WROs for VAWG Prevention Programming:

- CSOs/WROs stress that it takes **time and intensity for community mobilization** to shift attitudes, beliefs and norms underlying violence and this warrants flexible funding for at least 3–5 years. A critical foundation of community mobilization programming is the inception period, when organizations build relationships with communities, ensure that programmes will meet communities' needs and priorities, recruit and train staff and activists, and map key stakeholders.
- CSOs/WROs have also highlighted the need for prevention **programming that engages faith-based and traditional actors to be flexible and adaptable**, in order to respond to immediate emergencies. For example, in adapting their work with faith-based and traditional actors during the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Trust Fund grantee Trócaire in Kenya, pivoted to engagement through church-owned radio stations, using these platforms to communicate various VAWG prevention messages that, in the original programme planning, would have been disseminated through in-person meetings.
- CSOs/WROs stress that trainings for behaviour change are an essential component of prevention programmes. Funders may **consider funding models that are flexible because these support the intensive nature of training**, especially those training programmes that are more complex and are delivered over longer periods.
- CSOs/WROs stress that **mobilizing women as agents of change and adapting to the practical needs of women and girls** is an integral part of prevention programmes, and flexible funding allows them to meet them where they are. For instance, several grantees stressed that it was during implementation that they recognized that renting space for women and girls and community facilitators to gather and meet closer to the intervention site was better than expecting participants to travel to project offices and having flexible funding enables them to do so.

- CSOs/WROs can play a unique and important role in developing intersectional approaches to working with women and girls for VAWG prevention. 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. 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.
- Long term and flexible funding **enables CSOs/WROs to work at systems level and advocate for long term change**. If advocacy strategies begin but cannot continue, important momentum can be lost, and reversals in progress can be seen. Practitioners therefore stress that donors need to think differently about how to ensure a shared long-term agenda for prevention.
- CSOs/WROs stress that policies and funding should be designed in ways that allow practitioners the flexibility to respond and adapt to their contexts: VAWG prevention and response are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and both are important to eradicating VAWG. Therefore, practitioners caution against funding that only allows for design and implementation of one-dimensional programming that only does one or the other. Policies and funding should **be flexible in order to allow integrating prevention and response activities** in ways that holistically address the particular aspects of VAWG that practitioners have identified in their specific contexts, enables them to respond to their realities in appropriate ways, recognizing the ethical dimensions of the work that they do.
- CSOs/WROs stress that donors should **ensure longer-term, flexible funding cycles to accommodate adaptive programming.** A prevention project's ability to cope with and respond to change depends heavily on access to, and control over, key assets. Assets include both tangible capital (natural, physical and financial) and intangible capital (human and social). Many practitioners emphasized that access to and control over assets require flexible funding models – this includes having the flexibility to revise project budgets, indicators, and objectives in response to changes in design, including after inception, or in response to changing circumstances. Contingency budgets such as those provided by the UN Trust Fund enable programmes to respond to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and address barriers to action, which is especially important for projects working with marginalized groups.
- **Access to flexible funding that can meet both long- and short-term needs could help organizations in mitigating risks and managing resistance.** CSO/WROs stress the need for flexible funding so that they are better able to respond to the evolving circumstances of their work and create more spaces for open reflection on power dynamics and resistance in their specific contexts.

Recommendations from Practitioners: On the Need for **Supporting Collaboration and Co-Creation of projects** by CSOs/WROs for VAWG Prevention Programming

- CSOs/WROs have highlighted the need for donor support to do community mobilization work. CSOs/WROs are well placed to build trusting relationships with community members and be grounded in communities to ensure relevant, appropriate and accessible programming as it is important to **have realistic expectations of WROs and CSOs and consider how to build their capacities or leverage partnerships,** while continuing to focus on funding and support.

- CSOs/WROs stress that static and binary understandings (e.g. religion versus culture; modern versus traditional)which are unhelpful and inaccurate when working on VAW/G prevention. They instead **encourage exploring synergies and interconnections across organizations that work on religion and culture which can be identified through a recognition of interlinked continuums.** Embracing approaches that think in terms of mobile continuums and not fixed binaries avoids either/or standoffs, especially with custodians of traditions, which allows the reality of how these belief systems are situated, produced and interconnected to be recognized. CSOs/WROs stress that **VAWG prevention also requires a multisectoral approach, with faith-based and traditional actors treated as stakeholders among others in a wider system.** This integrates these actors into wider VAWG prevention work and creates accountability to their peers in other sectors.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the **need to programme in partnership with women living with overlapping vulnerabilities.** These women 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. CSOs/WROs also highlight the need for **funding collaborative work between local CSOs that are already engaging with diverse groups,** which may help to reduce fragmentation of policies or funding for separate vulnerabilities. Jointly tackling invisibilization needs collaboration, and this requires time and resources.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the **need for the development of guidelines on what it means to be participatory, because local interpretations on what participation and partnerships mean can vary** and range from information-sharing to consultation and co-creation. Unpacking the word and providing clarity to practitioners can go a long way in translating research on this subject into practice on the ground.
- CSOs/WROs stress that it is **important to design training that is participatory and that fosters safe spaces** for participants to reflect and learn. Being cognizant of power dynamics is important, as they influence the shape and design of training, from whom to include to how to lead the sessions and where to hold them.
- CSOs/WROs emphasized the **need for adolescents to be part of designing and implementing VAWG prevention programming** to make it ageappropriate and nuanced, to address resistance to key messages and to ensure that it is tailored to meet diverse needs (in relation to gender, sexual identity, race and ethnicity) even in the same age group (e.g. in relation to gender, sexual identity, race and, ethnicity).
- CSOs/WROs emphasize that it is **important for CSOs to build partnerships with each other to better leverage each other's complementary skills, capacities, and approaches because it builds resilience to resistance.** CSOs/WROs highlight the need for solidarity and communities of practice, especially as some grantees work in challenging and isolating contexts. Helping these organizations connect with similar CSOs in other regions to discuss and share their experiences can be very useful.
- CSOs/WROs stress that it's **important for researchers to 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.

Recommendations from Practitioners: On the Need for **Learning Iteratively** for VAWG Prevention Programming

- CSOs/WROs believe that **fostering a culture of learning to encourage reflection** on what works and what does not work is especially important as **community mobilization is complex** and challenging and its impacts can be hard to measure.
- CSOs/WROs **highlight the need for documenting lessons learned through practice-based knowledge** and partnerships between practitioners and researchers to ensure trust, sharing and acknowledgement of different forms of expertise and knowledge.
- CSOs/WROs emphasize that it is **important to conduct process evaluations to understand how programme outcomes or outputs are achieved.** When measuring change in outcomes to end VAWG, evaluations must consider the time it takes to implement aspects that are hard to measure, for example building trust among marginalized and vulnerable groups of women. Evaluations must also include data collection methods that can capture the subtle but significant shifts in women's agency in relationship dynamics, which are difficult to capture quantitatively. Mixed methods research that includes ways of collecting data on processes would highlight the mechanisms at play as these shifts occur.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the **need for donor support to capture and document lessons** on training including monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning around trainings for behavior change, so that lessons from work on the front line can be learned.
- CSOs/WROs stress that it is important to **strike a balance between supporting prevention programmes that emerge from established, evidence-based methodologies** and programmes that are more innovative but less established.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the need for developing **adaptive learning systems**, especially to meet the needs of those facing multiple and intersecting risks.
- CSOs/WROs stress that it is **important to create more spaces for open reflection in monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning components, especially on power dynamics and resistance**, as well as the risks and the trade-offs of feminist work so that organizations can reflect on large-scale changes during a project's implementation alongside the requirements of programmatic reporting.
- CSOs/WROs emphasize that **adaptive capacities require regular review and analysis of collected data to contextually inform and adjust programming. Data should ideally be collected with multiple key stakeholders from within and outside organizations** – that is, through advisory committees, which should meet regularly during the inception period and throughout implementation.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the need for appropriate research and evaluation methodologies that can adequately capture the complexity and fluidity of VAWG prevention programming. Research and evaluation methodologies that can engage with an approach to ending VAWG that sees prevention and response activities and outcomes as inextricably linked are desired. Rarely does a CSO engage in only service provision, or only primary prevention.

Recommendations from Practitioners: On the Need for **Managing Risks** of VAWG Prevention Programming

- CSOs/WROs highlight that a positive framing (e.g. reclaiming core spiritual values, including justice) has been shown to encourage uptake and support by faith-based and traditional leaders in some contexts. In addition, **identifying and agreeing shared principles early on between the various actors can facilitate a common understanding with respect to "do no harm"**. It is important to ensure the accountability of faith-based and traditional actors at community level, ideally including women's organizations. However, the exact nature of this accountability should be determined at local level and not imposed from outside.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the **need for implementing risk mitigation strategies** that include explicit recognition of the risk that change agents around adolescent-focused prevention programmes may also be perpetrators. Therefore, having strong sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse policies across all levels in programmes that engage parents, caregivers, teachers and peers of adolescent girls is critical.
- **CSOs/WROs can play a role in integrating risk mitigation exercises into programme design to plan for resistance.** For example, interventions' pre-implementation risk mitigation strategies can anticipate different types of resistance, such as passive or active resistance, or go further to consider forms of omission such as denial and appeasement, so that they are better prepared and can pivot and adapt should the need arise.
- CSOs/WROs emphasize on applying a risk mitigation approach to plan for potential disruptions as CSOs and WROs often face a myriad of unexpected contextual challenges that require the adaptation of their programme design and implementation to ensure its success and relevance. **CSOs and WROs should account for and plan for such risks from the design phase to implementation and MEAL.** Anticipating and mitigating risks is an important component of resilience and in supporting adaptive programming and includes establishing and following security and safety protocols for staff and participants and being flexible regarding the timing or frequency of intervention delivery.

Women survivors and children of war performing the theater play Pirilampu

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Recommendations from Practitioners: On the Need for **Paying Attention to Power Dynamics** by CSOs/WROs for VAWG Prevention Programming

- CSOs/WROs stress that is important for organizations to **pay attention to multidimensional power relations. 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.** CSOs/WROs highlight the need for more attention to intersectional power relations in the systems of donors – power relations may remain latent in their processes, for example if they use predetermined 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.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the need for **more research that explores the dynamics of training, such as on what makes a training programme transformative (as opposed to transferring knowledge)**; to what extent training as a strategy contributes to VAWG prevention; and if and how online training can nurture a sense of emotional safety or experiential learning.
- CSOs/WROs stress that there is a need for **developing evaluation and learning tools for gender transformative programming aimed at preventing VAWG**. Methodological toolkits that engage a diverse set of methodologies and engage practitioners working in this field as equal partners are needed to capture the kind of complex and adaptive change that takes place in reality.
- CSOs/WROs can play an important role in integrating power analyses into project conceptualization and design, as a **power analysis can help identify how resistance could emerge.**
- CSOs/WROs emphasize that it is important for **CSOs/WROs to build a shared advocacy agenda can help to prevent the over-exposure of one CSO or the risk of being labelled individually** as critical of the government because CSOs working to reform laws or policies for VAWG prevention are inevitably involved in a political task.
- CSOs/WROs highlight the need for support in **navigating complex power relations sensitively when working with stakeholders in formal and/ or informal government and legal systems**, which inevitably means that individual CSOs often have to navigate spaces that are highly politicized. This can make it harder to adapt programmes quickly or to use the framing or language desired by CSOs or donors.
- CSOs/WROs can play a **unique and important role in supporting an enabling environment for community mobilization by identifying and collaborating with key opinion leaders and gatekeepers**, holding governments and institutions accountable for commitments made through laws and policies on preventing and responding to VAWG and promoting gender equality, and linking mobilization efforts to local or national policies or plans. CSOs/WROs emphasize that it is important for them to reflect on their relationships and mitigate inequitable power dynamics with community members, and guard against instrumental use of participation with communities.

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