



LEARNING FROM PRACTICE BRIEF SERIES: ISSUE NO. 5

TRAINING FOR BEHAVIOUR CHANGE TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS LESSONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED BY THE UN TRUST FUND TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

PHR partners Clinical Officer Sylvester Mesa and Senior Nursing Officer Emily Kiragu testing MediCapt at Kenya's Naivasha Hospital. Credit: Adriane Ohanesian/Physicians for Human Rights

Background

Interventions to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) are often complex and address multiple drivers simultaneously. They commonly involve training, which is often seen as a tool or an activity, and as “near essential”. It features across the spectrum of strategies – from training couples, communities and community mobilizers on how to prevent VAWG to training service providers and internal staff. It should be implemented in combination with other strategies. It supports prevention programmes, and experts call it one of 10 crucial elements in effective VAWG prevention programming.¹

What do we know about the role of training in VAWG prevention? Prevention projects are often good at raising short-term awareness but have mixed success in effecting longer-term behavioural or social norm change. There is not enough documentation on why, or how, to integrate training into different prevention programme pathways to sustain shifts in social norms. Although some work on

gender training recognizes the transformative potential of this tool,² there is scope for building knowledge on how to leverage it effectively to prevent VAWG specifically.

About this brief

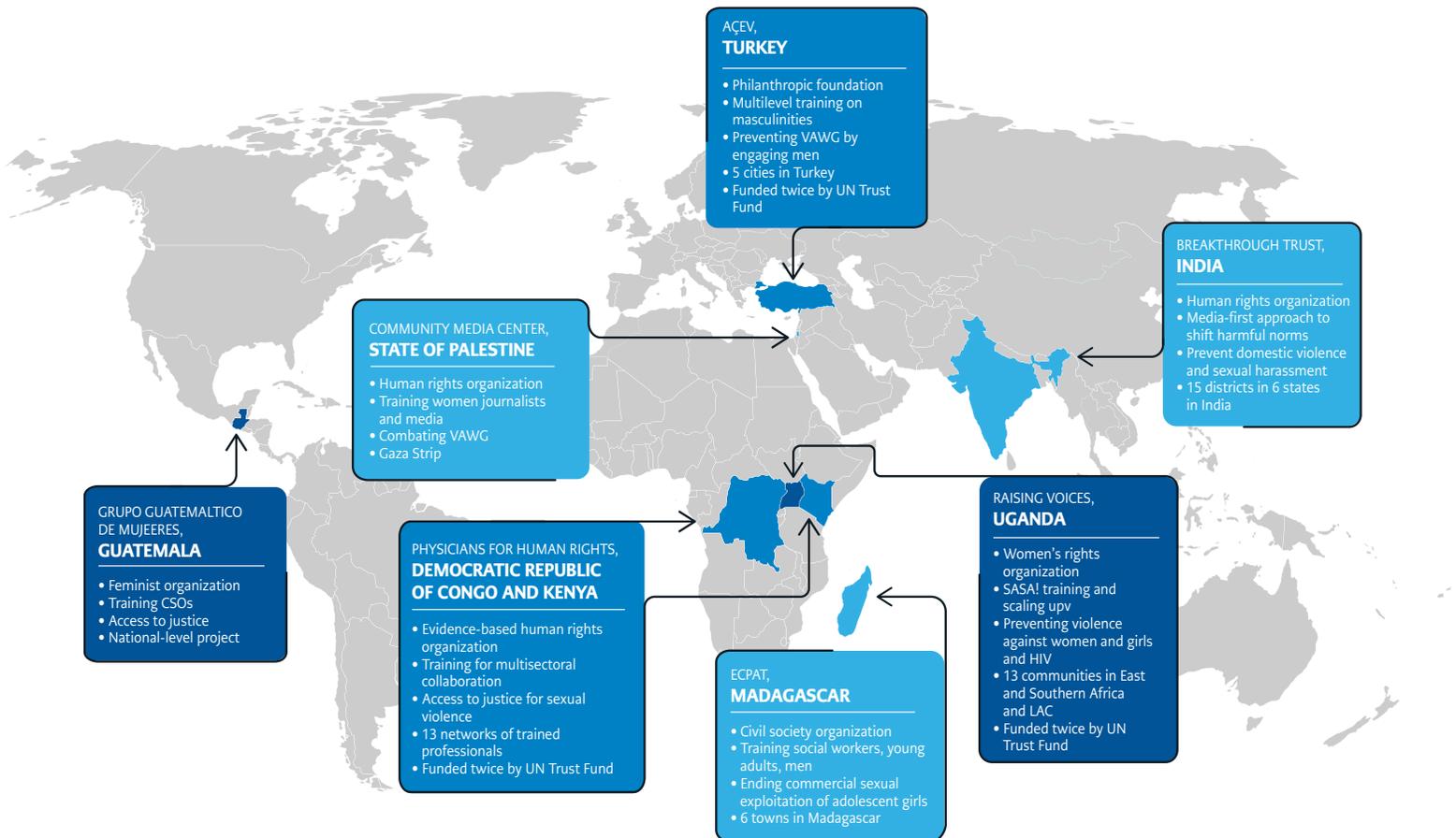
This brief summarizes a longer synthesis review. It compiles lessons from practice from seven civil society organisations (CSOs) supported by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women on training for behaviour change for VAWG prevention. Designing and implementing training with multiple stakeholders often requires years of experience in the sector and practitioners’ knowledge of what works in specific contexts. Training is a dynamic process that depends on the community and constantly evolves. Practice-based knowledge provides critical insight into training as a **strategic** lever to prevent VAWG. The focus is on what works and why, the context, the lessons learned, and what makes the design and roll-out of VAWG prevention training particularly complex.

¹ See R. Jewkes, S. Willan, L. Heise, L. Washington, N. Shai, A. Kerr-Wilson and N. Christofides (2020), Effective design and implementation elements in interventions to prevent violence against women and girls (Pretoria, What Works to Prevent Violence).

² See K. Milward, M. Mukhopadhyay and F. F. Wong (2015), “Gender mainstreaming critiques: signposts or dead ends?”, IDS Bulletin, vol. 46, No. 4, pp. 75–81.

FIGURE 1:

The seven UN Trust Fund projects included in this brief

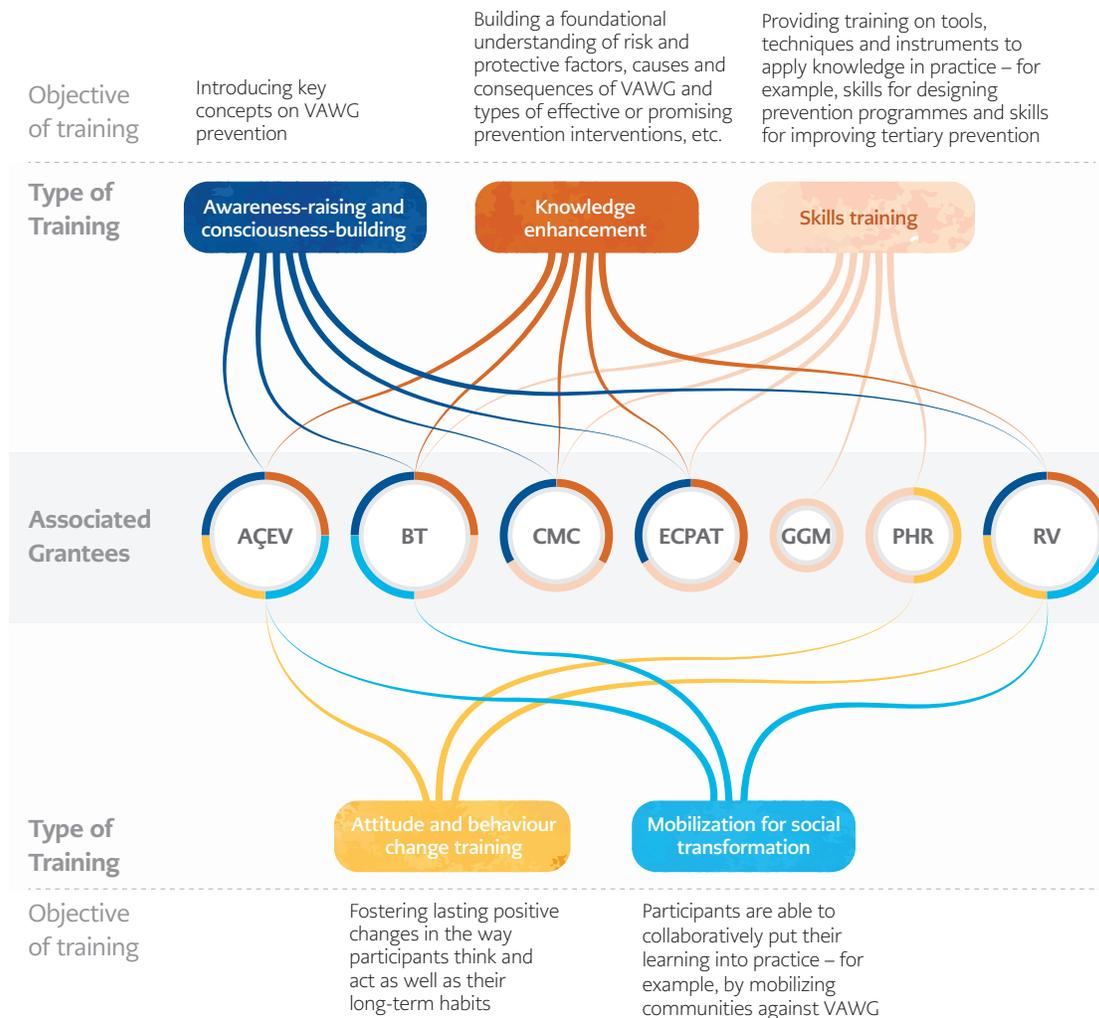


Case studies

Ten projects by seven organizations contained rich practice-based knowledge on training. The selection includes projects based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Madagascar, the State of Palestine, Turkey and Uganda. The types of organizations ranged from small and grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs) to international human rights and feminist organizations. Each organization used training differently. The Community Media Center (CMC) in the State of Palestine trained women journalists and media graduates on gender and human rights, and imparted technical skills. ECPAT France trained social workers and journalists in Madagascar on sexual exploitation of minors and ending VAWG. Breakthrough Trust (BT) takes a media-first approach

to VAWG prevention, and trained women's groups, youth activists, CSOs, law enforcement agencies and the media in India. Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) trained clinicians and law enforcement and legal professionals on the forensic documentation of cases of sexual violence. Grupo Guatemaltico de Mujeres (GGM) worked to promote a legal framework to end VAWG in Guatemala. Raising Voices (RV), a Ugandan non-governmental organization, trained community mobilizers on its SASA! mobilization approach and offered technical assistance (including training) to its partner CSOs to support the implementation of their SASA! programmes. Finally, AÇEV (Mother and Child Education Foundation) is a Turkish foundation that worked with fathers and designed a multilayered training programme for its cohorts. The lessons from practice are presented in the following sections.

FIGURE 2:
Mapping training typologies to the interventions



Practitioners’ experiences of training for behaviour change

Practitioners working for the seven CSOs shared valuable lessons learned on how to design and implement effective training, including challenges they faced. The brief presents key lessons learned on four aspects relevant across the projects, highlighting how practice can inform theory.

1. The importance of design in training for VAWG prevention

The CSOs involved in co-creating this brief, shared 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. Depending on the desired outcome and the specific community or subgroup, training can take different forms, such as training-of-trainer models, working closely with specific community groups or using mentoring. The choice of medium or platform of communication is also key: some training components have integrated multimedia and digital platforms; others require deeper in-person engagement.

It is important to ensure that the project implementers and facilitators are themselves trained before roll-out. Those responsible for implementing VAWG prevention projects typically receive training to assist them in their work. This is especially important when they come from the same community in which they are expected to work

and drive processes of change. They have been socialized in the same context. To encourage social norm change, they need to be supported in reflection. The community needs to see these facilitators as upholding the values they are committed to imparting. It is important not to overlook training facilitators, as it sometimes falls under human resource management rather than programme design.

For example, Raising Voices trained community activists to empower them and provide the skills needed for their work. Their training followed the SASA! methodology.

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).

2. Designing training to support learning and unlearning trajectories

A primary lesson learned from the CSOs is the need to ensure that training spaces do not replicate the power dynamics that VAWG prevention interventions attempt to shift, dismantle and unlearn. Training spaces must not replicate power inequalities between participants or participants and trainers, so participants **feel safe** and able to contribute and engage critically. The design of the physical space (e.g. the way chairs are placed) or the nature of the group (mixed or same-sex) can either support or stifle participation. For example, some CSOs shared that participants felt more at ease in their training and able to talk honestly when they were separated by gender; in mixed groups, they tended to stay within their “roles”, e.g., mothers, wives, husbands and fathers. In mixed groups, men were emboldened, and spoke dismissively of VAWG and women’s experiences, while women were uncomfortable speaking out.

The CSOs shared that the way training is designed 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. Breakthrough Trust

in India trained youth social change activists in video-based storytelling. The participants responded well, and Breakthrough Trust disseminated the films through its channels. In Madagascar, ECPAT created 12 stories that carried messages about gender equality, sexual violence and the rights of women and girls, and countered stereotypes about sexual violence. These were written and tested in the community before being read out in schools, youth and social centres, and libraries. However, writers pushed back when they perceived that the stories were “going against Malagasy culture”. This led to rewrites to avoid offence while still communicating the key messages clearly without compromising core values.

Programmes should ideally be designed to support individuals. One way to achieve this is phased training combined with support and mentorship. Participants need to feel that their trainers and these spaces nurture a sense of learning that matches their pace. Longer-term engagements therefore can have more impact than short or single-session training. New techniques and methods require an intensive **repetitive** process of introducing, teaching, reinforcing, practising and experiencing skills. There is much to learn from projects working on secondary and tertiary prevention. For example, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) in DRC and Kenya used a model wherein participants alternated between experiential training sessions and hands-on learning to master the skills. This was done despite patchy internet connections, poor connectivity and limited resources. From this, another important lesson emerged: skills training need not depend on specific supplies, tools or resources; it is effective when it is adapted to local resources and limitations.

3. Importance of training tools and resources

CSOs found that manuals, lexicons, toolkits, apps and websites were vital to codify best practices, streamline procedures and create an institutional history. They should be put together in collaboration with stakeholders and embedded at the heart of the training sessions. 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, PHR received feedback from participants that a lexicon of medical terms would be useful. The lexicon made legal professionals more willing to engage more deeply in understanding sexual violence crimes, and improved cross-team relationships between doctors and law enforcement and legal professionals.

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 behaviour 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).

Training project implementers on using multimedia and social media to initiate conversations with communities on VAWG has also been found useful by CSOs. For instance, multimedia and social media are at the heart of many of Breakthrough Trust’s interventions, and multimedia training is a central component of its mobilization strategy. Its youth activists were given two types of training: on fundamental concepts of gender, human rights and violence, and on running online campaigns.

Training individuals to create online spaces for engagement on VAWG prevention has been a successful strategy for some CSOs that bolstered on-ground (offline) strategies. For example, the online space can help manage knowledge to support VAWG prevention, and information

collated online can make critical issues more visible. In Guatemala, GGM published information online to support its on-ground activities. It collated all the gender-based violence data available and created data narratives that demonstrated alarming trends in a manner that the public could easily understand. However there is a need for training on measuring the impact of digital tools. While there may be little research on this in ending VAWG, CSOs often take inspiration from social media and marketing methodologies.

4. Importance of networks and communities of practice in training

Informal communities of practice have been created by CSOs around formal training sessions. The shared experiences of participants create spaces for co-learning and a support network of peers. Yet these spaces are temporary, and they are not sustained beyond the end of the programme. If these spaces can be nurtured, participants can continue learning. They can also serve as “bridges” between sessions. However, sustaining these informal spaces can be resource-intensive and not all CSOs will have the capacity to run them. Some CSOs reported that instant messaging and social media can be especially useful in creating independent peer learning networks. However, an organization needs to choose the most appropriate social media platform or app for its objective.



I think as an organization we really just think that for the work to become embedded, and for people to feel supported, [training] is more of a process of accompaniment, mentorship, training and mutual learning (Interview with a grantee organization, 22 February 2021).

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. Facebook, for example, is useful for sharing and discussing issues; in Breakthrough Trust’s project, at the end of a training session for journalists in Uttar Pradesh, a participant created a Facebook group to share information and connect afterwards.

5. Importance of training wider sets of stakeholders in the project ecosystem

Alongside training directed at the particular agents of change in each project, sensitizing secondary stakeholders is important, according to all CSOs. Their willingness to “get on board” can significantly affect project outcomes. Several of the CSOs stated that their interventions depended on external factors such as the responsiveness of service providers, and the support of the larger environment (from the family to the community). **For instance, Breakthrough Trust noted that the apathy of the service providers responsible for preventing and responding to violence was particularly challenging, especially when stakeholders are professionally siloed, but need to collaborate with each other.** PHR approached this by training all stakeholders together. PHR reported that multi-sector training sessions can break down barriers and hierarchies between stakeholders, create a more conducive space for support and learning, and focus everyone’s attention on preventing VAWG and supporting women and girls. It reported changes in power dynamics between the service providers and a willingness to engage with their peers across “borders”. Such multisectoral training can lead to greater trust between stakeholders and better service delivery. Improving multisectoral service delivery has a positive effect on VAWG prevention, for example, by protecting women and girls from **further institutional violence.**

Several interventions in this review trained the media on gender-sensitive reporting and considered them an important channel for VAWG prevention messaging. The CSOs offered direct training for journalists and created toolkits on gender-sensitive reporting. For journalists,

these training sessions offered valuable upskilling and specialization in their metier. However, care should be taken to assess how familiar the media and journalists are on issues of gender, power and violence prior to the training. CSOs found that delivering only skill-based training may not suffice if they are not familiar with concepts of gender. For example, CMC had to offer additional gender and human rights training to its cohorts of journalists. When working with the media, training and outreach must be targeted at all levels, including editors and senior management. **CSOs found that conducting power analyses upstream can help identify the stakeholders that need to be reached through training.**

6. Using training to achieve sustainability and scale

“One of our organizational values is to be agile and responsive, and we try to hold to that truth in the way we work with partners” (Interview with a grantee organization, 22 February 2021).

When training is imparted effectively, the sustainability of the interventions truly rides on the shoulders of the participants, according to CSOs. These stakeholders become the protagonists of the next phase of the intervention, either in their institutions or in their communities. Especially at times when organizations have to scale back their interactions, such as during a pandemic, these individuals become the faces of the interventions. Several CSOs used the training-of-trainers strategy to scale up their interventions either geographically or in size. The training-of-trainers allows local trainers, and in some cases training participants, to take ownership of the programme and become trainers.

However, CSOs also reported that the training-of-trainers model has to 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. Partner organizations must also show a sufficient level of engagement; many of the organizations may not be accustomed to specific approaches and monitoring by the parent organization is advised.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TRAINING

COVID-19 has significantly affected prevention programming; in particular, training of key tertiary prevention personnel has been negatively affected.

Some of the grantee organizations were able to keep communication channels with their stakeholders open. **In most cases, training continued online**, but CSOs required significant resources to adapt their programmes (including training) to virtual spaces. Some training sessions were delivered online or through pre-recorded videos where internet connectivity was limited. AÇEV trainers used WhatsApp groups to support its father cohorts remotely, and sent them activities and weekly summaries to do.

And then we started to think about a more sustainable way to support fathers, because COVID-19 was not going away, and it was getting worse and worse. So we came up with a new implementation model called “father meetings” that we are currently implementing ... Held over a package sent to the participant fathers, father meetings are carried out with weekly video-sharing meetings over WhatsApp or Zoom. In the package, along with content that reinforces parenting skills with texts and activities, there are other materials like games and books that support both the conversation and interaction between parents and children. Fathers also receive a weekly internet package to cover their requirement of internet data to ensure their participation. COVID-19 has been hard, but we have tackled this period. Feedback coming from the field has been very positive (AÇEV, interview, 22 February 2021).

These online models were cost-effective; at a very low cost, they could have many participants. CSOs pointed out, however, that online sessions introduced new challenges, in particular linked to the digital divide. One of the big disadvantages of online training is that it is harder to foster a sense of shared learning between participants and to train on practical aspects and skills. Furthermore, organizations need to have the resources and support to design effectively for this space.

Crises can also provide unexpected opportunities for new avenues of engagement. For instance, during the COVID-19 crisis, CMC moved its engagements online, and held discussions on digital security for women. This space of engagement in ending VAWG is new to many CSOs, but as more people shift to interacting online, it could become an important area of work for them.

Lessons learned and recommendations

Training can be a powerful tool in prevention interventions in connecting the wider body of knowledge around gender and VAWG prevention with learning through practice. This brief suggests that overall, practitioners, donors and researchers should prioritize and encourage monitoring, evaluation, research and learning around training, so that work on the front line is captured.

CSOs demonstrate that thoughtfully designed training can support participants to engage in a process of change – they invest a lot in finding the best design that is participatory and that fosters safe spaces for participants to reflect and learn. The following recommendations for practitioners, donors and the research community are based on these CSO’s experiences.

Recommendations for practitioners:

- 1. Invest in designing training that is participatory and that fosters safe spaces where participants can reflect and learn.** Being cognizant of power dynamics is important, as they influence the design of training, from whom to include to how to lead the sessions and where to hold them. Designs should be tested, and facilitators, trainers and programme staff should first be trained themselves so that the values of these key individuals and the programme align. These resources and time frames should be built into programme calendars.
- 2. Design training that works with the resources available in the local context.** For example, training programmes designed for high-income countries must be adapted to be suitable and effective in the specific contexts where the training is taking place.
- 3. Design training that supports the participants to work at a pace that suits them.** Think of training as a process of change. Transformation cannot happen overnight, and training programmes need to be paced to allow participants to build knowledge and develop skills. Training cycles are effective when they are structured (even free-flowing sessions can be systematic) and reinforce skills over time; ideally, they should be followed up with sustained relationships and mentoring.
- 4. Organizations should ensure regular refresher training is provided and a feedback loop is created, especially for**

facilitators and trainers. Building in space for feedback from participants is especially important, as it offers opportunities to learn, revise, reflect and tailor the programme to their needs. This feedback also builds trust between communities, key stakeholders and their institutions, and the implementing organizations.

5. **Nurture and build networks that emerge from training: networks of individuals, of partner organizations and of institutions.** Collaboration and synergies are important and can help to sustain the outcomes of training. CSOs reflected that a highlight of the training programmes was the informal spaces that emerged, where networks were forged and relationships built. One of the challenges of virtual interaction (resulting from the pandemic) was in replicating these spaces online.

Recommendations for donors and policymakers:

1. **Support adequate budgets for designing and piloting training formats.** Encourage partner organizations to allocate resources and time to testing, design and training key personnel.
2. **Support networks of partner organizations and communities of practice that emerge from training.** Funders may also consider models that are more flexible and support the intensive nature of training, especially programmes delivered over longer periods with many stakeholders.
3. **Consider funding the capturing and documentation of lessons on training.** Although organizations include budgets for training, there can be less focus on consolidating lessons from it. Donors should prioritize monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning around training.
4. **Consider investing in bridging the digital divide, particularly given that more and more training spaces are going virtual.**
5. **Consider striking a balance between supporting training programmes that emerge from established, evidence-based methodologies and those that are more innovative.**

Further areas of research:

1. **More research is required on the how and why of VAWG prevention training.** There are several how-to tools and training manuals, among other things, available that capture practitioner's work. These offer valuable cross-cutting lessons that can be compiled systematically.
2. **More research is required on the dynamics of training, such as on what makes a training programme transformative** (as opposed to simply transferring knowledge); to what extent training contributes to VAWG prevention; and if and how online training can nurture a sense of emotional safety or experiential learning.
3. **Metrics on online engagement and activities need more research.** Measuring online engagement is a growing area of study, and many market research organizations have a good understanding of social media engagement and reach. A more nuanced understanding of these media and their effectiveness both in the gender space and in VAWG prevention work is needed. Relatedly, more research is needed on the limitations and opportunities of online and in-person training.
4. **More research that supports the cross-fertilization of research and lessons, especially between primary and tertiary prevention, will be critical going forward.**

FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

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About the UN Trust Fund: The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) is the only global grant-making mechanism dedicated to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. Managed by UN Women on behalf of the United Nations system since its establishment in 1996 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 50/166, the UN Trust Fund has awarded almost \$183 million to 572 initiatives in 140 countries and territories.



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