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USAID's Collective Action to Reduce Gender-Based Violence (CARE-GBV)

Foundational Elements for Gender-Based Violence Programming in Development

Section 3.4. Program Elements: Enabling Environment

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GBV	Gender-based violence
LBT	Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those of other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence against women
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

To effectively prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV), it is critical to understand and positively influence the broader environment, including the political, economic, and social dynamics that enable or curtail GBV.

The guidance presented here on strengthening the enabling environment for GBV programming was adapted from the RESPECT Women framework (WHO 2019) and implementation package (UN Women and Social Development Direct 2020) to be applicable to programming for everyone who experiences GBV. USAID staff and implementing partners should use this guidance in both integrated and standalone GBV programs to strengthen the enabling environment using four strategies:

(1) building political commitment, (2) investing in women's rights organizations, (3) supporting and implementing laws and policies, and (4) promoting the allocation of resources.

This section describes what is involved in cultivating an enabling environment in each area and why efforts in these areas are important for successful GBV programming. Questions for USAID staff to consider are also provided, along with useful tools and resources.

At a Glance: Strategies for Strengthening the Enabling Environment through GBV Programming

The four strategies for strengthening the enabling environment to reduce GBV are:

1. Build political commitment
2. Invest in women's rights organizations
3. Support and implement laws and policies
4. Promote the allocation of resources

(WHO 2019)

Strategy #1: Build Political Commitment¹

What Does It Mean to Build Political Commitment?

In the context of GBV programming, building political commitment around GBV means generating support from political leaders, officials, and traditional or religious authorities at the national, regional, and local levels for measures that prevent and respond to GBV. It also includes supporting community leaders to speak out and act against GBV. Political support may take the form of public pronouncements, national strategies, operational policies, government-led programs, and funding. GBV organizations may also seek commitment from governments by holding them accountable for upholding GBV-related international agreements, laws, policies, and budgetary commitments.

Why Is Political Commitment Important for GBV Programming?

Soliciting the support of political and traditional leaders is critical to preventing and responding to GBV effectively. For example, ministries of health, education, justice, and social welfare must all be engaged in developing and implementing policies that mitigate GBV and in promoting the multisectoral institutional collaboration required for effective GBV response. In some countries, ministries of women or gender lead cross-ministerial collaboration on GBV, and they need political backing and funding to spearhead government efforts effectively. Traditional and community leaders can play a crucial role in preventing GBV, such as through vocal opposition to child, early, and forced marriage and unions and denouncing intimate partner violence. When people in positions of power decide that GBV is a serious human rights issue and a public, rather than private, concern, this signals to all that GBV is not acceptable, generates momentum for strengthening laws, and helps survivors reclaim their rights. Political leadership is also needed to advance gender equality more broadly on issues such as land rights, education, women's political participation, and income inequality as eroding factors that contribute to GBV. As reflected in the program example, groups may also need to build political will with service providers and human rights groups to address the needs of specific communities, such as people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), persons with disabilities, or members of ethnic or religious minorities.

¹ This section is adapted from UN Women and Social Development Direct. 2020. "RESPECT Framework: Strengthening the Enabling Environment for VAW Prevention." New York, NY: UN Women. Accessed May 24, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/RESPECT-implementation-guide-Strengthening-the-enabling-environment-for-VAW-prevention-en.pdf>.

Program Example: Building Political Will to Reduce Violence against the Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Community in Albania

Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) women in Albania experience psychological and physical violence related to their status as women, their sexual orientations, and their gender identities, yet they have had poor access to existing services. Even women's organizations—especially those outside of the capital city—have been unaware of the needs of this community. The Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT People responded by working with political leaders to bolster support for LBT access to health and education services, and with women's nongovernmental organizations and LBT women outside the capital to increase their capacity to advocate for change. The group conducted research on the gaps in institutional response to violence against LBT women, the results of which informed their advocacy with the Albanian government. The government used these findings as the basis for the commitments made in the National Action Plan on LGBTI People (2016–2020). The Alliance continues to assist with implementation of the national plan to ensure the use of best practices for LBT women. An evaluation of the Alliance's work found that their engagement with women's groups, health professionals, and educational leaders resulted in increased identification, assessment, support, and referral of cases of GBV among LBT women (UN Women 2017).

Tools and Resources

- Raghavendra S, K Kim, S Ashe, M Chadha, PT Piirone, and N Duvvury. 2019. "Estimating Macroeconomic Loss Due to Violence Against Women and Girls: A Policy Toolkit." Galway, Ireland: National University of Ireland-Galway. Accessed May 24, 2022. <https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/350-toolkit-final/file>.
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Strategy #2: Invest in Women's Rights Organizations²

What Does It Mean to Invest in Women's Rights Organizations?

Organizations promoting women's rights, the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those of other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQI+ people), and other human rights provide essential leadership in anti-GBV efforts. Investing in these organizations means more than engaging them for small, individual activities. These groups often serve as local technical experts on larger projects with little, if any, overhead support. Investing in human rights and anti-GBV groups recognizes their technical leadership and helps them access the resources needed to maintain their operations.

Why is Investing in Women's Rights Organizations Important for GBV Programming?

Women's rights organizations (WROs) are well placed to play key roles in GBV programming due to their expertise and experience. Historically, they have been at the forefront of GBV efforts, as described in the RESPECT Women Implementation Package on strengthening the enabling environment:

“ Women's rights organizations (WROs) are on the frontline of supporting survivors and have pioneered effective models to prevent and respond to violence against women (VAW). This has included: designing community mobilization strategies, which have reduced levels of violence; advocating for better referral systems and formal services (e.g., women's police stations, family courts); providing informal services (e.g., shelters, psychosocial support) and direct accompaniment to survivors so they can access the services they need; and promoting the use of technology to monitor VAW and support women's safety. ”

(UN Women and Social Development Direct 2020, 5)

² ibid.

In addition, because they are locally rooted and continue to operate beyond the timeline of many GBV projects, these organizations and networks are also critical to sustaining anti-GBV efforts.

However, despite their clear leadership and work to dismantle the structures that sustain GBV and hold leaders accountable for making progress against GBV, these organizations receive very little aid money. A study by ActionAid in 2020 found that WROs, for example, received just 1.5 percent of aid money committed for work on gender equality (ActionAid 2021).

USAID staff and implementing organizations should consider investing in diverse organizations (see Box 1.2. GBV and Diversity in Section 1.0. Introduction), as many groups work on GBV from different perspectives and represent different populations (see Section 2.0. Core Principles: Intersectionality). Organizations supporting the rights of LGBTQI+ people work to raise awareness that GBV affects their constituencies as well. They advocate for decriminalization and destigmatization of diverse SOGIESC identities to reduce structural GBV (OutRight Action 2019). Organizations promoting the rights of persons with disabilities often engage around GBV as it affects their constituencies and bring an important perspective to efforts to meet the needs of all people affected by GBV. Indigenous rights organizations may also address the specific ways GBV affects indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people.

Tools and Resources

- Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). 2019. “Toward a Feminist Funding Ecosystem: A Framework and Practical Guide.” AWID Resourcing Feminist Movements Initiative. Accessed May 24, 2022. <https://www.awid.org/resources/toward-feminist-funding-ecosystem-framework-and-practical-guide>.
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Strategy #3: Support and Implement Laws and Policies³

What Does It Mean to Support and Implement Laws and Policies?

Implementing laws and policies means that all GBV-related commitments from government, employers, school administrators, or anyone else in charge of an institution are understood, respected, and carried out by that institution. Although the implementation of laws and policies may seem straightforward, it is often complicated by barriers. Officials may lack the political will to put a law or policy into practice, the resources dedicated to implementation may be insufficient, or public awareness of the law or policy may be too low to generate momentum against or for it. Effective implementation requires sufficient public awareness, political will, and budget to make laws and policies meaningful. Similarly, the RESPECT Women Implementation Package on strengthening the enabling environment cautions:

“However, it is important to note that while strong legal and policy frameworks are important for protection and response and a vital part of expanding women’s access to justice, there is little evidence that laws against VAW act as a deterrent for perpetration or reduce levels of VAW. In many countries, there is also a significant implementation gap and laws and policies are not implemented, especially in more remote areas. Effective implementation of laws and policies requires political commitment, dedicated budgets, trained personnel, coordinated action and comprehensive access to services” (UN Women 2012).

Why Is Supporting and Implementing Laws and Policies Important for GBV Programming?

Laws and policies guarantee rights and protect people from harm. For example, laws and policies that criminalize marital rape, set the minimum legal age for marriage at 18, prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, or protect respectful maternity care are all meaningful. However, without implementation, which requires enabling conditions like public awareness, political will, access to services, and budget to enforce them, these laws and policies have little effect.

³ *ibid.*

Laws and policies that promote gender equality are also critical to curtailing GBV. Laws protecting equal rights to inherit property, take out a loan, divorce, or go to school, for example, are also important for reducing GBV (Amaral 2017, Abramsky et al. 2011). Gender identity laws and policies that allow transgender people to self-determine the name and gender that appear on school and medical records and other official documents may mitigate the risk of violence and increase their access to education and health and social services (Lanham et al. 2019).

USAID staff can help facilitate implementation by supporting governmental ombudspersons or civil society groups that monitor implementation and advocate for full enforcement of laws and policies. USAID staff can also work with host-government counterparts to align national, regional, and local policies with guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other United Nations bodies on GBV. Policies and budgets for specific sectors—including health; democracy, human rights, and governance; education; and agriculture—and multisectoral plans of action are all potential entry points for strengthening the integration of GBV (WHO 2021).

Program Example: Removing Discriminatory Laws Can Reduce Violence against Women

Initiatives to empower women and girls by changing discriminatory laws can prevent GBV and improve quality of life. An evaluation on the change in state inheritance laws in India found that the reforms increased women’s asset ownership and were associated with important declines in GBV. As summarized by the Prevention Collaborative, “This study assessed the impact of equalizing inheritance rights for men and women on levels of violence against women in 16 states in India. The authors used the staggered implementation of amendments to state laws governing inheritance for Hindu women to compare changes in levels of violence in states that liberalized female inheritance earlier versus later. The study found that aggregate levels of violence against women (VAW) reported to the police fell by 36 percent in states where inheritance rights were made equal for males and females over a period of 28 years (1976–2004). The decline was consistent across three distinct measures of VAW, lending credibility to the findings. In addition, using household-level data, the study found that women who married after the amendments, were 17 percent less likely to ever experience intimate partner violence (IPV), a result explained by families’ increased willingness to invest in securing better marriage matches for their daughters” (Prevention Collaborative 2018, 1).

Tools and Resources

- Tavares P, I Santagostino-Recavarren, and A Sinha. 2019. "Protecting Women from Violence: Bridging the Implementation Gap between Law and Practice." Indicators Group research note. Washington, D.C.:World Bank. Accessed May 24, 2022. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33222>.
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Strategy #4: Promote the Allocation of Resources⁴

What Does It Mean to Allocate Resources?

Allocating resources means building sustained and substantial investment in all areas needed to advance GBV programming, including advocacy, research, prevention programs, and service delivery.

Why Is Allocating Resources Important for GBV Programming?

To date, GBV programs have not garnered the resources they need to significantly reduce incidence, particularly in relation to the immensity of the global impact of GBV. Funding is needed to implement all aspects of the *Foundational Elements*, in addition to funding other development priorities that intersect with GBV.

Local organizations that are struggling to cover the core costs of running an organization and retaining staff are often unable to focus on the GBV work, which is immensely taxing emotionally and physically, in and of itself. Therefore, where possible, funding should be flexible, long term, and cover core costs so that GBV services and programs do not fluctuate in quality and availability. As the world has seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, health crises and lockdowns increase the need for GBV services. Government ministries responsible for GBV prevention and response, which are often small and poorly resourced, must also have the funding they need (Equality Institute 2019).

USAID staff can help reduce this deficit by encouraging the integration of GBV activities into sectoral programs and by investing in advocacy for increased funding. USAID can also work with other bilateral and multilateral funders to encourage governments to allocate domestic resources for evidence-based GBV programming, including through sectoral ministries.

Box 3.4.1. Does Funding Actually Reach Women's Networks and Other Progressive Local Organizations?

- Women's rights organizations receive only 0.13 percent of the total official development assistance (ODA) and 0.4 percent of all gender-related aid" (Dolker 2021, 4).
- "Ninety-nine (99) percent of development aid and foundation grants still does not directly reach women's rights and feminist organizations. In particular, those groups working at intersecting forms of marginalization (LGBTIQ, indigenous, young feminists, and sex workers) are funded even less" (Dolker 2021, 4).
- From 2015 to 2016, only 72 transgender rights organizations in all countries outside the United States received a combined total of \$7 million (Scamell 2019).

⁴ ibid.

Tools and Resources

- The Equality Institute. 2019. "Global Scoping of Advocacy and Funding for the Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls." Canberra, Australia: Equality Institute. Accessed May 24, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2012/7/handbook-for-national-action-plans-on-violence-against-women>.
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- World Health Organization (WHO). 2017. "Strengthening Health Systems to Respond to Women Subjected to Intimate Partner Violence or Sexual Violence: A Manual for Health Managers." (Chapter 7 describes financing of GBV health services and costing templates.) Geneva, Switzerland: WHO. Accessed May 24, 2022. <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259489/9789241513005-eng.pdf;jsessionid=DF9A14BBAF2178193FDCEE311294E500?sequence=1>.

Questions for Consideration

	Solicitation Stage	Implementation Stage
	<i>Does the solicitation require or recommend that applicants:</i>	<i>Does the program:</i>
Identify relevant international, national, subnational, and local GBV policies and laws—including religious and customary laws—that could support or hinder programming? Assess local political will for GBV programming?		
Consider any legal reforms needed to expand and implement comprehensive legislative approaches for GBV prevention and justice for survivors?		
Engage government ministries, civil society, and community groups to strengthen formal and informal structures in support of GBV prevention and response?		
Partner with and fund regional, national, and local women’s rights organizations and other groups and networks working on GBV and human rights?		
Map groups that oppose acting against GBV, including those with an agenda that is anti-LGBTQI+ or anti-women’s rights, and develop plans to mitigate backlash from groups?		
Promote social behavior change strategies and measure changes in community acceptance of GBV?		
Consider inputs needed to deliver GBV interventions (such as fixed costs, training costs, staff, safety mechanisms, and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities) and dedicate a specific amount or percentage of funding to support this?		
Pay staff rather than relying on volunteers and ensure line items in the budget for staff security, reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, self-care, capacity building, and refresher training?		

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The goal of the Collective Action to Reduce Gender-Based Violence (CARE-GBV) activity is to strengthen USAID’s collective prevention and response, or “collective action” in gender-based violence (GBV) development programming across USAID. For more information about CARE-GBV, click [here](#).

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