

# Effective Responses for Gender Based Violence

## Addressing GBV in Post-Conflict & Fragile States: A Case Study of Sierra Leone

### Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence

LEARNING BRIEF NO.7

While attention is largely given to the prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV), particularly sexual violence, targeted at women *during* conflict, there is increasing recognition of the need to address GBV in the *aftermath* of conflict and during post-conflict transition. Women and girls face particular challenges in dealing with both the effects of GBV that they may have experienced during a conflict and the on-going violence that they experience in their homes and communities after conflict.

Recognising this, the Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence initiated a research project to document learning on addressing GBV in post-conflict settings.<sup>1</sup> Nine of the Consortium members are operating in Sierra Leone and as a result this country was chosen as the site for the research (Action Aid, Amnesty International, Christian Aid, Concern, GOAL, Irish Aid, Plan, Trócaire and World Vision). Sierra Leone has experienced over a decade of protracted armed conflict (1991-2002) characterized by egregious abuses of human rights and humanitarian law and in which women and girls were specifically targeted for forms of conflict-related gendered violence. It has also experienced a further decade of post-conflict recovery and transition and presented an ideal site for assessing post-conflict approaches to GBV.

The OECD/DAC 'Principles on Fragile States and Situations' (hereafter referred to as 'the OECD/DAC Principles') were used as a framework for the research.

The OECD/DAC Principles acknowledge that post-conflict states require differentiated approaches to development than those employed in more stable or developing countries (**See Box: OECD/DAC Principles on Fragile States**).

#### OECD/DAC Principles on Fragile States and Situations (2007)

The OECD/DAC Principles recognise that many fragile states are those emerging from periods of armed conflict, such as Sierra Leone.<sup>2</sup> The OECD/DAC Principles promote enhanced ways for international actors to individually and jointly address the issues of insecurity and poverty common to these contexts:

1. Take context as the starting point.
2. Do no harm.
3. Focus on state-building as the central objective.
4. Prioritise prevention.
5. Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives.
6. Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies.
7. Align with local priorities in different ways in different contexts.
8. Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors.
9. Act fast ... but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance.
10. Avoid pockets of exclusion.

<sup>1</sup> The GBV Consortium understands Gender-based Violence to be any act or threat of harm inflicted on a person because of their gender and is any act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Gender based violence encompasses sexual violence, domestic violence, sex trafficking, harmful practices, forced / early marriage, forced prostitution, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation. The programmes in Sierra Leone largely focus on GBV experienced by women. Programmes that engage with men focus on their role in the prevention of violence towards women. This Learning Brief focuses on women's experiences of GBV in line with research findings on these programmes.

<sup>2</sup> In its report 'Monitoring the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, Fragile States Principles Monitoring Survey: Global Report' (2010) the OECD identified 13 states that it considered relevant to application of the Principles. This includes Sierra Leone.

The United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960 also recognise that differentiated approaches are required in post-conflict programming. The resolutions set out to ensure that gender sensitive approaches are taken within conflict resolution, post-conflict recovery and transition and that specific approaches are taken to address GBV during and after conflict.<sup>3</sup> They also highlight the need to ensure that gender inequalities do not become entrenched in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction efforts.

The research by the Consortium similarly examined whether specific approaches to GBV programming may be required in fragile or post-conflict states.<sup>3</sup> Through qualitative interviews with staff of all member agencies active in Sierra Leone, the research reviewed the Consortium's programmes against the OECD/DAC principles and made recommendations related to good practice.<sup>4</sup> This Learning Brief highlights some of the key findings of the research and includes some examples of programmes that Consortium members are undertaking (note that due to space constraints examples from all agencies could not be included).

While the Consortium recognizes that GBV is not confined to conflict-affected contexts, the purpose of the Learning Brief is to demonstrate learning specifically relevant to such contexts. Linkages are made between the OECD/DAC Principles and examples of programming, demonstrating both the relevance of the OECD/DAC Principles to such work as well as some of the conflict-related factors relevant to GBV programming.

## 1. Approaches to GBV Programming and Adherence to OECD/DAC Principles

Consortium members undertake a variety of approaches to addressing GBV in Sierra Leone and the majority of programmes focus on women's experiences and are related to women's empowerment and equality. Different modalities of programming are also used such as direct implementation and working through partners. The research found two broad categories that capture overall programming approaches: 1) Direct Programming and 2) Mainstreaming Approaches.

### Approach 1: Direct Programming – Prevention and Response

A number of the Consortium members operating in Sierra Leone are engaged in direct programming on GBV. Programmes address the prevention of GBV through behaviour-changing and awareness-raising programmes, create access to and strengthen justice responses for women, and promote women's economic empowerment. Programmes also provide essential services to victims/survivors of sexual violence.

#### (i) Prevention- Awareness-Raising and Behaviour Change Approaches

The importance of understanding the 'picture' of violence before, during and after conflict – both in terms of trends in GBV, perceptions of the same and the ways in which endemic forms of GBV post-conflict are perceived and understood - is important in informing appropriate responses to GBV after conflict (**See Box: OECD/DAC Principle 1**).

<sup>3</sup> During the research process it was found that the OECD/DAC Principles were not familiar to many people and the term 'fragile state' not widely used in reference to the Sierra Leone context. 'Post-conflict' was more widely used and is thereby used in this paper. It is acknowledged that there are many debates about when a conflict begins and ends, when a state is 'post-conflict' and when a post-conflict' phase ends and development begins which this paper cannot address but simply uses this term for ease of reference and discussion.

<sup>4</sup> The research was conducted over a ten-day period in October 2011.

The research found that the prevalence of sexual violence during the conflict made the broader issue of GBV more visible, prompted agency responses to it and has influenced engagement on endemic forms of GBV in the post-conflict context. Many respondents to this research felt that “before the war people did not know their rights”. As a result of a lack of social, legal and political acknowledgement of GBV as an infringement of women’s rights before the conflict, the violence prevalent in their homes and communities was first named as ‘GBV’ or as a ‘rights’ issue after the conflict had ended.

**OECD/DAC Principle 1 - Take context as the starting point.**

Action Aid Sierra Leone took steps to ensure that its programming on GBV was based on an understanding of the ways that GBV had taken place historically, and used this to inform ongoing forms of GBV. When initiating programming on GBV in target communities, Action Aid Sierra Leone undertook a ‘Participatory Vulnerability Analysis’ (PVA) with community members. As part of the analysis the community conducted a time-line which identified the views of community members on trends in GBV before, during and after the Sierra Leone conflict. As a result, the community themselves, as well as Action Aid staff, could identify and understand the nature of violence before, during and after the conflict and the particular vulnerabilities facing women and girls that need to be addressed in the post-conflict context.

Agencies are therefore introducing new ways of understanding this violence in the post-conflict context. The key to much of this work has been transforming normative understanding of violence in the home and community from something that is ‘acceptable’ or tolerated, to an issue which may be considered an abuse of rights and a ‘crime’. An important element of this overall process has been the use of rights-based language by these programmes. Many organisations use international rights and national legislative frameworks as a basis for this work, particularly the three ‘Gender Laws’ which Sierra Leone introduced as part of legislative reforms since the end of the conflict.<sup>5</sup>

Using such tools not only promotes understanding and use of them by duty bearers and potential users, but also lends legitimacy to awareness-raising initiatives on GBV (**See Box: OECD/DAC Principle 3**).

**OECD/DAC Principle 3 - Focus on state-building as the central objective.**

The Access to Justice and Law Centre (AJLC), partner of Trócaire, provides legal aid to women wishing to pursue legal redress for GBV through the criminal justice system. AJLC simultaneously engages with the judiciary and the police to promote standard judicial responses to GBV, appropriate use of the ‘Gender Laws’ and provides capacity development support to strengthen the systems that AJLC are encouraging women to use. AJLC have also targeted macro level structures which are necessary to their work. They have developed a critique of the three ‘Gender Laws’ and highlighted gaps within the laws such as the lack of provision for health care to women under the domestic violence act. AJLC’s work contributes to promoting the capacity development and re-building of national systems such as the judiciary and police which are inevitably weak as a result of the impact of conflict. Engaging with national structures is key in ensuring that when women are encouraged to report violence, the systems and services are ready to respond.

It has been important to ensure that communities understand GBV in its broadest sense – as an issue arising from gender inequalities and which is prevalent within and outside of armed conflict (**See Box: OECD/DAC Principle 4 & 5**). It was felt by many of those engaged in awareness-raising programming that the ways in which GBV is being newly understood has resulted in more reporting: “this violence has always been there but now people are aware and they are talking about it”. The awareness-raising is understood to have triggered a sequence of events from generating new understanding of violence, to reporting and seeking assistance from services.

<sup>5</sup> The Sierra Leone Government adopted three ‘Gender Acts’ in 2007 which provide a legislative framework to address gender inequality, discrimination against women and GBV. These are the ‘Domestic Violence Act’; the ‘Devolution of Estates Act’ and the ‘Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act’. A Child Rights Act was also passed in 2007 which affords protection to children from violence and abuse. At the time of this research, a Sexual Offences Act was pending debate at government which, when promulgated, will provide specific legal codification and response to sexual assault.

**OECD/DAC Principle 4 - Prioritise Prevention, and Principle 5 - Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives**

The concept of 'security' tends to focus on political and state-level issues. 'Gender security' is relevant to consider however so that the violence in women's homes, schools etc. is also 'counted' as part of approaches to development and security. RADA (Rehabilitation and Development Agency, partner of Christian Aid) draws the gender, security and development nexus into their programming by making explicit linkages between the GBV that occurs in the home and community, and that which occurred during the conflict. During community-based training sessions they work with male participants to understand that "If you accept this [violence] during peace then you will have to accept it during conflict". This kind of approach demonstrates to communities that if violence against women is tolerated during peace-time then it will inevitably be tolerated and happen during conflict. The approach is particularly useful in addressing the broader roots of gendered violence during conflict that ultimately begin in women's homes and communities.

Several 'entry points' have been used by Consortium members and their partners in their awareness-raising activities. These include approaches that engage exclusively with women, exclusively with men, with men and women, at the family unit level and with key 'opinion makers' such as traditional and religious leaders **(See Box: OECD/DAC Principle 7)**. One Sierra Leonian respondent noted that when international organisations first came into Sierra Leone after the conflict and began working on GBV, there was an exclusive focus on women within these programmes. There is a risk that GBV is understood as a 'women's issue' rather than as a societal issue, and one which is relevant to and implies responsibility among men.

Given that the concept of GBV may be introduced for the first time to many communities after conflict, there is an opportunity to promote a broader understanding of the issue and ensure that approaches that simultaneously, yet in a differentiated way, engage both men and women are undertaken.

**OECD/DAC Principle 7 - Align with local priorities in different ways in different contexts.**

The Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR), a partner of Trócaire, have found that "starting from where people are already at" i.e. aligning with local priorities works best. In order to raise awareness and promote behaviour and attitudinal change, they have engaged with religious and traditional leaders to influence these 'opinion makers' own influence on their communities. CDHR have structured some of their training around messages that draw on teachings from the Bible and Koran. They have used this approach as a platform from which to demonstrate that the use of violence against women is not a sanctioned act under either religious philosophy and thereby should not be condoned. Following training sessions, the imams and priests who participate have developed action plans which include actions to communicate messages against GBV in their weekly sermons and in Sunday Schools. The implementation of these commitments are monitored by staff members who attend these services and observe how messaging is being delivered.

Awareness-raising and behaviour change approaches are viewed by agencies as activities which have created better understanding and local level responses to GBV and overall assist in the prevention of GBV.

## (ii) Response - Multi-Level and Comprehensive Responses to Addressing GBV

The research found that in order for GBV to be addressed and prioritised there is a need for programming on GBV to work at macro, meso and micro levels (**See Box: OECD/DAC Principle 2 & 9**) and for strategic approaches to be taken to institutional strengthening after conflict. Similar to many conflict-affected countries globally, in Sierra Leone much of the national services infrastructure was damaged during the conflict. Many services, such as the judiciary, policing and health and education systems had to be reformed after the conflict. Weaknesses in current services may be directly and indirectly attributed to the conflict as well as encompassing the typical challenges faced by many poorly resourced or developing countries.

### **OECD/DAC Principle 2 – Do not Harm, and Principle 9 - Act fast...but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance.**

The International Rescue Committee (IRC), with support from Irish Aid, has evolved its initial humanitarian survivor-centred service provision programme to a broader holistic multi-levelled approach in the post-conflict context. It has four basic components operating at multiple levels:

1. Prevention – promoting behaviour change and positive messaging on gender equality;
2. EASE Programme (Economic and Social Empowerment Programme) – establishes savings and loans systems to promote women's economic empowerment;
3. Provision of Essential Services – three sexual assault response and referral services to survivors (Rainbo Centres);
4. Advocacy – promotes effective response to GBV at national, district and grassroots levels.

This overall approach enables programming at micro levels to inform engagement at macro levels. The transition from direct service provision to capacity development approaches has been a key challenge and attempts are being made to transition the Rainbo centres for example to national ownership. IRC recommend that while ideally services such as the Rainbo Centres are embedded in national structures such as the health system from the outset, this has to be balanced against the urgent need to provide quality essential services to women.

Many respondents noted that within the processes of post-conflict reform, the issue of GBV competed with 'hardware' issues and those considered to be higher priority (such as rebuilding roads) and that perception persists at national level that addressing GBV is not needed in processes of post-conflict state building and recovery. The UN women, peace and security resolutions have underscored the fundamental importance of addressing gender equality and GBV as part of political reform and state building during and after conflict. Addressing the broader inequalities that inform GBV must be prioritised within all levels of the new structures and services that are created at national levels after conflict. In line with the OECD/DAC Principle 8 *Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors*, and Principle 10 *Avoid pocket of exclusion*, collaborative and coordinated approaches between agencies is essential to ensure broader coverage of gaps and needs at all levels.

## **Approach 2: Mainstreaming GBV into Programmes**

A number of Consortium members in Sierra Leone are taking effective approaches to mainstreaming GBV into wider sector programmes. Concern Worldwide for example has taken an approach that incorporates working from schools outwards to ensure that responses to GBV are embedded in schools, families, wider communities and national systems (**See Box: OECD/DAC Principle 6**).

Overall, the research found that it can be difficult at times for agencies to secure funding for programmes that attempt to mainstream approaches to GBV. It is critical to be able to demonstrate the impact of GBV on outcomes in broader programmes such as health and education. For example, in the education sector it is well documented that 'quality education' entails ensuring the safety and protection of girls and boys in schools so that learning and completion of education can take place.

**OECD/DAC Principle 6 - Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies.**

In order to address GBV within its existing education programme, Concern Worldwide works with a partner, Pinkin-to-Pinkin to undertake a multi-faceted approach where they have:

- developed and disseminated a simplified version of the Child Rights Act to schools and trained teachers on the 'Teachers Code of Conduct' which was developed by the Ministry of Education;
- set up Child Rights Clubs where children learn and become peers on child rights issues, including learning about how to report on GBV and the Teachers Code of Conduct;
- engaged with and trained the School Management Committees to encourage them to hold teachers accountable and to become a structure which children can approach and report violence.

The programme works from the school out to the connected communities and has developed a referral pathway for reporting of School-Related GBV (SRGBV) based on the structures and resources available at local levels. The mapping exercise also identified the gaps and obstacles to the reporting process. Among the obstacles identified were the lack of resources and capacity faced by the Family Support Units (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police to respond to reporting. A key lesson for the Concern Worldwide education programme was that raising awareness of GBV with children, school and community structures creates increased reporting. It became apparent that increasing 'demand' among children and communities requires ensuring that the 'supply' end functions to meet such demand. Simply raising awareness at school and community level is not enough, but engaging with the structures which their work interfaces with, such as police services, is just as important.

## 2. Key Learning and Recommendations for Programming

Evident in Sierra Leone are contradictory views about whether the conflict still has a bearing on the current context. There remain questions as to when a post-conflict status ends, when 'development' begins and how agencies interpret these phases through their work. While there are efforts made by some agencies to take account of the post-conflict status of Sierra Leone, others simply employ approaches rooted in wider development programming, which in some cases, appear to address the post-conflict nature of the context by default rather than by design. It can be challenging to ensure that programming takes account of the political, social and economic changes that take place in post-conflict transition. However, these changes also represent opportunities which programming can take advantage of to ensure that GBV is adequately addressed. Recommendations highlight the steps that can be taken to ensure that programmes respond adequately to conflict-affected contexts:

*Recommendation 1: Use the OECD/DAC Principles to inform project design so that conflict analysis and contextual factors present in many post-conflict contexts are taken into account in a consistent manner.* Significant alignment may be seen between Consortium members' programmes and certain Principles, such as Principle 6 - *Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies* - because of the focus of many programmes on GBV as a manifestation of inequalities. However, attention to other principles would promote a more holistic approach to addressing GBV. For example, the OECD/DAC Principles promote the need for multi-level coordinated initiatives, which were also identified by this research as essential for addressing GBV in the aftermath of conflict.

Additionally, Principle 3, (*Focus on state-building as the central objective*), provides an opportunity to build national capacity so that the programmes at grass roots level are positioned within and supported by sustainable national level institutions and commitments to promoting women's equality and addressing GBV. Taking a holistic approach that corresponds with the OECD/DAC Principles will align programmes with national priorities and the strategic and practical needs of women, making them more relevant and sustainable.

*Recommendation 2: Enhance Your Organisation's Understanding of the Complexities of Post-Conflict Transition.* Develop strategic approaches to working in post-conflict contexts by:

- enhancing institutional understanding of the broader issues and the specific challenges facing post-conflict and transitional contexts;
- developing appropriate in-depth assessments in specific sites (jointly where possible) to map the particular issues that face women and girls following particular armed conflicts (such as the example in *OECD/DAC Principle 1*);
- assessing and strengthen capacity of staff within your own institutions as well as with target groups, and employing training techniques that promote reflection on personal attitudes and beliefs.

*Recommendation 3: Take Steps to Understand the Landscape of GBV and the Challenges Faced by Women and Girls after Conflict.* Draw on existing data such as reports of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, collaborate with other agencies to undertake appropriately designed research and assessments or conduct analysis with men and women to facilitate their own identification of trends of violence in their homes and communities. Use this evidence base to address the particularities of GBV post-conflict. Ensure to consider the impact of conflict-time violence as well as the endemic violence prevalent in homes and communities. Take ethical considerations into account when undertaking consultations and assessments on GBV. Ensure that staff are trained on ethical and appropriate ways of engaging on different forms and aspects of GBV.

*Recommendation 4: Identify and Utilise the Opportunities that May Exist in the Post-Conflict Moment.* Identify where there are opportunities within national level political and structural reforms that may take place after conflict to secure national commitments to gender equality and GBV. This may entail:

- supporting priorities identified by national women's networks;
- the establishment of a ministry on gender equality in new government structures with adequate resources;
- the creation of specialised units to address GBV within policing structures. Include training on GBV in police training curriculum and for the judiciary;
- the provision of essential health and psycho-social services that respond to the range of GBV that women and girls experience, including the after effects of conflict-time sexual violence, ongoing sexual violence and specific approaches to domestic and other forms of abuse. Ideally these are embedded in national structures depending on national capacity and contextual factors;
- ensuring that approaches to GBV are mainstreamed in any sector and services development such as in education and health.

*Recommendation 5: Support and Secure the Development and Implementation of a Supportive Policy and Legislative Framework.* Research has found that "countries coming out of conflict have been more attentive to GBV than non-post-conflict countries" due to the opportunities that present in transitional reforms. This must continue to be the case to ensure that opportunities are taken advantage of and that national commitments to women's rights are secured after conflict.

Align programmes and strategies on GBV with corresponding national frameworks. This will ensure that programmes are based on national priorities and support implementation of the same. This will in turn foster collaborative ways of working between agencies, and between agencies and government on the basis these frameworks.

The frameworks may also be used as tools upon which to base programming and will lend legitimacy to interventions with the police, judiciary, community-level leadership and community members.

*Recommendation 6: Work at multiple levels, best facilitated through coordinating with other agencies, so that multi-sectoral initiatives operate in connected ways at micro, meso and macro levels.* Single-agency programmes should also work to make connections from grass-roots to national level so that challenges and obstacles to addressing GBV are comprehensively addressed. Effective coordination mechanisms led by a national entity at macro and meso levels are needed to provide a platform for sharing of information and the creation of collaborative approaches.

*Recommendation 7: Through awareness-raising approaches, facilitate the introduction of new concepts in ways that enable communities to translate new terminology into everyday meaning.* Work from the basis that GBV has existed before and during the conflict, and help communities understand gender inequality as the basis for GBV that takes place as part of political violence and the GBV that exists in their homes and communities. Coordinate with agencies undertaking similar awareness-raising programmes to ensure consistency of messaging from the outset.

*Recommendation 8: Concurrently Address Both Demand and Supply Needs.* Ensure that initiatives to create awareness and encourage reporting of GBV are complimented by efforts to strengthen the capacity of response services, such as policing and health. It must be recognized that structures and systems are particularly fractured and weak following destruction that may have occurred during conflict. There is a responsibility to ensure that when encouraging women to report, there are adequate services that will ensure her and her family's safety.

*Recommendation 9: Provide leadership on and standards for approaches to addressing GBV.* International donors and NGOs can provide leadership on GBV at national level and engage in policy dialogue with government to encourage and support national leadership on the issue. Donors should also encourage and support implementing partners to address GBV and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse through wider sector programming.

*Recommendation 10: Use the UN women, peace and security resolutions in advocacy strategies with national governments,* particularly where there is a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in place, or there is need for one. Non-governmental organisations can also use the resolutions for lobbying international donors, utilizing donors' own commitments and action plans on UNSCR 1325 to lobby for more leadership, funding and policy dialogue on GBV at national levels.

## References

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- iii UN SCR 1325 (2000), UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009), UNSCR 1889 (2009), UNSCR 1960 (2010)  
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- v Tripp, Aili Mari (2010) *Legislating Gender-Based Violence in Post-Conflict Africa*, *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 5, no. 3 At 13
- vi OECD (2010) *Monitoring the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, Fragile States Principles Monitoring Survey: Global Report*. OECD

The Irish Joint Consortium on GBV comprises Irish Human Rights, humanitarian and development organisations together with Irish Aid and the Irish Defence Forces working together to tackle gender based violence.

For more information on the Consortium please go to [www.gbvi.ie](http://www.gbvi.ie)

