

Effective Responses for Gender Based Violence: Developing a Community Based Approach

Irish Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violenceⁱ

LEARNING BRIEF NO.1

Learning Brief on Developing a Community Based Approach

This Learning Brief is based on experience which emerged at a Gender Based Violence Learning Day: Effective Responses to GBV organised by the Irish Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence, June 2009ⁱⁱ. While much of what is covered in this brief relates to tackling GBV in stable environments many of the principles are relevant and can be adapted for fragile or humanitarian contexts.

1. Introduction

Unfortunately, in many countries there is a high level of acceptance of GBV, a low level of response by the State, and little support or services especially in rural areas. There is a poor understanding that GBV is a human rights violation, and most often it is perceived as a (petty) internal family problem immune to external intervention. Conflict-related sexual violence generates a certain political will to address GBV, and there are many guidelines and toolkits pertaining to GBV in humanitarian situations. Less attention is given to the prevalence of GBV in more stable environments, and this briefing document, which should be considered as a work in progress, is an attempt to bridge this gap.

2. Getting Started: Design Issues

Clarity of roles. Seek to engage with local partners as early as possible as their leadership in combating GBV is more appropriate and more sustainable than that of external agents. Their role will be to facilitate a process to bring about change through strengthening skills and building capacity at the community level. The role of external organisations should be conceived around strengthening the capacity of partners for advocacy and service delivery.

Within organisations, it may be necessary to invest time and resources in staff, male and female, who may be resistant to working on GBV. Moreover, female staff who are otherwise committed to addressing GBV may be reluctant to work on engaging men even though support from a community for such an approach may be strong.

Define Gender Based Violence within the local context. Programming for GBV should be contextualised within any given situation, for example, the impact of conflict on sexuality. Within development contexts, it is important to frame GBV as a community issue from the outset, and to explore with communities the different forms of violence in their community - physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence. A distinction needs to be made between pathological violence which needs the response of mental health services, and behavioural GBV which has the potential to be tackled by communities, and which is the focus of this paper.

ⁱ 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, to name but a few.

ⁱⁱ Speakers at the event include Heidi Lehmann, International Rescue Committee; Kanwal Ahluwalia, Womankind West Africa; Tina Musuya, Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention, Kampala; Julius Kitembo, Community Worker, Kampala, Mairead Dunne, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex. Workshop inputs from Rita Fagin of 'St Michael's Estate Community Development Project' and Aileen Foran of 'Ringsend Action Project' also informed this briefing paper.

Approach. Some pre-requisites that should guide the design of a programme that seeks to tackle GBV include the following:

1. *Commit to an appropriate time—frame.* Recognise that prevention of violence is a) a long term process that focuses on the changing of belief systems and behaviour norms, and b) that change needs to be sustained over time. This will require organisational commitment and advocacy with donors.
2. *Do a thorough analysis – in advance.* Analyse existing data and if necessary conduct research on GBV. Before designing a programme draw on existing data, and if necessary carry out research on violence in the location where you intend to work. Be sure to look for data and research that examines reasons and nature of GBV patterns as well as incidence. Data may be available at national level, in household surveys, from ministries of women’s affairs or civil society groups.
3. *Adopt a holistic approach, not separate projects.* To address GBV, programmes should be designed as part of a multi-level, multi-sectoral approach – no one sector or agency can succeed on its own, hence the important of coordination.
4. *Have a clear objective.* It is important to have a clear and easily communicated objective such as a ‘safer community for all’. The objective should be phrased and communicated so that it get maximum buy in from as many sections of the community as possible (i.e. avoids targeting or excluding men or women)
5. *Be prepared to work at different levels:*
 - *Legal framework.* Analyse the national legal framework to see what protection it provides e.g. a Domestic Bill, human rights law, child protection laws. Where there are gaps, resistance or delays, it will be necessary to build alliances among civil society groups to consistently advocate for laws that provide protection. It may also be necessary to advocate on traditional and customary laws.
 - *Service providers.* Even where laws and policies exist, there is likely to be a gap in terms of implementation. Thus, it is necessary to identify, and if required, train service providers such as police, health workers, the judiciary so that referral services can be built over time.
 - *Community* Women and men will engage with the informal, community system first, rather than referring to the formal system. Build on this by working with the whole community taking them through the process of change. The community should identify what needs to be done, who should do it, and how it should be done?
6. *Engage men as well as women;* they should know that they are both stakeholders in resolving the issue. Involvement of men is important for a range of reasons, a) to promote social reintegration of survivors of GBV so that women are not rejected; b) to avoid a backlash from men; c) to promote sustained social change as change cannot be achieved without engaging the whole society; d) for peer pressure as men will listen to men, and leadership from men is key, and e) because men in the majority of cultures are key power holders without whose engagement behavioural change and adjustments in power relations is impeded..
7. *Keep the focus on women and girls.* There is need for caution lest the involvement of men becomes an end in itself rather than a means to bring about sustained change. While working with men it will also be necessary to encourage the provision of services and referrals for women. Women need to be supported to break the silence and in reporting and resolving issues with police and traditional leaders. Supporting women’s economic independence through training and microfinance may also assist in reducing violence.

8. *Have a critical mass.* A critical mass is required to effect change in attitudes and practices as well as to create new norms that do not tolerate GBV. If the target group is too small it will not be able to have community impact.
9. *Plan for scaling up.* Work with communities that have links with, or have the potential, to work with other communities. Replicate the methodology in other areas and with other partners.

3. What needs to be in place for effective interventions?

Clear methodology. There is need for a clear methodology to guide the interventions through a process of change. Several guides and toolkits are available online (see References below).

Community ownership Change must come from within individuals and communities themselves – it cannot be imposed. Communities will need to develop strategies for mediation and sanctions. Community responsibility and ownership of solutions can be promoted by creating an open environment to discuss violence and exchange views. Peers and leaders can be critical change agents.

Resources. Funding agencies need to adequately resource such programmes with personnel, finance and materials.

Supportive environment: A conducive environment is required to support interventions such as a legal framework that provides protection and punishes perpetrators, as well as services to support those affected by GBV. Where these do not exist, community sanctions may prove effective, but in the longer term there will be need for coordination and advocacy locally and at a national level.

Continuous investment in community resource: Addressing GBV is a complex and challenging role and community members should receive on-going support both to address their own attitudes, and to provide guidance to their work.

M&E system to track impact of the process and in the community.

4. Implementation Issues

(i) *Identify community entry points*

- Use entry points that capture the attention of men, and of women, recognising that these may not be the same. Only using channels that focus on women, such as health providers or women's groups, are unlikely to work on their own.
- Identify the governing structures within communities; entry points may be through traditional and/or religious leaders, elders, those involved in education. Discuss their attitude to changing norms; ensure they are not promoting violence.

(ii) *Go beyond raising awareness programmes*

- Though they are often the focus of projects seeking to tackle GBV, human rights and awareness training on their own is not sufficient. Awareness raising has a role in getting men to contemplate their own behaviour, and in getting the community to discuss such issues as: how does conflict and violence affect different groups in the community – men, women, children? What needs to be done to change this? The community must come up with practical actions to tackle GBV (solutions), and hold people accountable (sanctions).

(iii) *Sustain change when it happens.*

Seek to embed anti-violence norms in by-laws, tenants' agreements, membership organisations. Build capacity of community institutions that support anti-violence e.g. religious leaders, elders, men's and women's groups.

(iv) *Working in an environment where there are no support services in place*

In many contexts, especially rural areas, few, if any, services exist to assist in addressing GBV. In such situations, a community approach, grounding the work in the grassroots is key. Look for circles of influence in the society to work towards creating a conducive environment e.g. family, households, community, traditional and /or religious leaders, police, health service workers, teachers. To redress the dearth of services, bring these various actors together to identify their comparative advantage and seek to build their technical and institutional capacity.

Work to empower the community not to tolerate GBV and that they should hold perpetrators accountable e.g. the family sends a clear message that it does not approve, neighbours clearly articulate that violence is not acceptable, leaders agree a system of sanctions against perpetrators. Generate discussion and expose the community to information at many levels e.g. in the church, through the elders, using posters.

In summary, there is no easy way to prevent and respond to GBV; a series of integrated and coherent approaches at all levels of society are required that involve the widest community representation to identify practical and local, as well as national solutions for greatest likelihood of sustainable change

References:

The Gender Based Violence Technical Unit, International Rescue Committee, New York, www.theirc.org

Mobilising Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence, a Resource Guide developed by Raising Voices, Kampala. Raising Voices also has videos and other publications. www.raisingvoices.org/publications.php

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.gbv.ie

The current members include:

