

Supporting Women Leaders



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Key Concepts

Women's Leadership and Community Wellbeing

Women leaders are community members who are regarded with authority or who motivate or influence others toward a purpose or common goal. Women may occupy formal leadership positions in elected, inherited, or nominated roles in traditional, religious, governance, or cultural systems. Women may also be considered leaders by virtue of their family or husband's position in these institutions. In addition to formal leadership positions, women may serve as informal leaders because of their work, such as teachers; healthcare workers; leaders of women's associations, organizations, or VSLA groups; or because of their work as advocates for women's rights or for groups of women and girls, such as those with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities, or displaced women. All types of women leaders can serve as advocates to strengthen the health, safety, wellbeing, and inclusiveness of their communities. When women are empowered and involved in leadership roles at all levels of public and social life, the entire community benefits. Where women are empowered:

- Communities experience lower rates of violence and crime.¹
- There is greater economic, social, and political progress for all.²
- Countries are less likely to go to war with neighboring countries.³
- There are lower levels of income inequality in countries with greater numbers of women leaders in legislative positions.⁴
- A peace agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years if women participate in its creation.⁵

"The transformation of power relations starts to occur when women and girls have self-determination and access to and control over resources. In order for this to happen, patriarchal systems should give way to more inclusive and representative leadership structures."

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
(2017) A conceptual model of woman and girls' empowerment.

Women Leaders and GBV Prevention & Response

Women's leadership and empowerment is also key to addressing GBV. Some of the critical ways that women leaders contribute to addressing GBV are outlined below.

Women leaders help promote women's empowerment and gender equality. Gender inequality causes, enables, and perpetuates GBV. GBV occurs in the context of gender-based imbalances in social power, control of resources, and participation in public life. Gender inequality is manifest in almost every sphere of life, at individual, community, and societal levels. Structural inequalities result in the abuses of power that women experience in forms of violence perpetrated by individuals, families, communities, and the State.⁶

1 Featherstone, A., Christian aid, CAFOD, Tearfund, and Islamic Relief Worldwide.. *Keeping the Faith The Role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response*. Tearfund/Mairo Retief, 2015.

2 Women Deliver. *Balancing the Power Equation Women's Leadership in Politics, Businesses, and Communities*, 2018. <http://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/09/2018/Women-Leadership-Policy-Brief9.23.18-.pdf>

3 O'Reilly, M. *Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies*, 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/>

4 OECD. *Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth*, OECD Publishing, 2014. <http://dx.doi.org/-9789264210745/10.1787en>

5 *Why Women*, 2015, p.6.

6 GBV AoR. *The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming*, 2019. <https://gbvaor.net/#keydocument->

Empowering women individually and collectively, and transforming inequitable norms, systems and structures is at the heart of ending GBV. Women leaders can help empower women and girls and transform the conditions that sustain gender inequality in many ways, including:

- Influencing beliefs, attitudes and norms that foster inequalities and sustain women's subordinate status in the family and community.
- Providing more equitable representation and participation of women and girls in community structures and decision-making processes.
- Serving as role models for other women and girls and supporting them to develop skills, confidence, and other assets that build agency.
- Building, nurturing, and mobilizing collective action toward greater safety, dignity and equality for women and girls.
- Positively influencing women and girls' access and control over resources and decision-making within the community.

Women leaders are critical actors and agents of change in all efforts to address GBV. GBV teams should identify both formal and informal women leaders as part of the process of Building a Foundation. GBV teams can also work to meaningfully engage women leaders in GBV Response, Risk Mitigation, and Transformative Change programming, as set out in related chapters of this Toolkit. This chapter of the Community Leaders' Toolkit aims to complement the other chapters by focusing on how GBV teams can further women leaders to support their work and help promote women's empowerment and gender equality, recognizing that addressing gender inequality is not only a foundational aspect of ending GBV, but also critical to all humanitarian programming.

Women leaders represent and advocate on behalf of women's interests and rights in relation to GBV.

Women leaders can represent and promote women's voices, needs, and perspectives within community and humanitarian decision-making processes and programming in relation to GBV. Women leaders can improve attention and resourcing to GBV and advocate for improved access to services and justice for women and girls.⁷ They also provide a key entry point at the community level to learn and share information about the women's experiences, interests, priorities and needs in relation to GBV, especially for groups of marginalized and/or less visible women, such as young women, women with disabilities, minority, and refugee women.

Women leaders are a cornerstone of GBV prevention, mitigation, and response efforts in communities.

Women leaders often spearhead community led GBV prevention and response before, during and after emergencies. This includes campaigning and raising awareness, supporting and advocating for survivors, establishing response services and systems, mitigating risks and improving women and girls' safety, and demanding and catalyzing action to prevent GBV.

Considerations for GBV Teams Preparing to Support Women Leaders

There are a number of considerations for GBV teams when planning how to best support women leaders and women's leadership in the community.

Building women's leadership skills and capabilities can itself be transformative to women's individual and collective experiences. Developing and supporting women's leadership skills and capacities can build confidence and capabilities and enable women to find power within themselves and with others to challenge inequitable and unjust power structures.

⁷ USAID. *The Role of Traditional Leaders in Preventing and Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Findings from KwaZulu-Natal, Northwest and Limpopo Provinces in South Africa*, 2010.

Not all women in leadership positions act in the interests of women’s equality or empowerment, and sometimes, they may even reinforce the interests and perspectives of male leadership. This means GBV teams should carefully assess which women leaders represent the needs and interests of women and girls in the community when undertaking community mapping (see **Building a Foundation**) and use this information to guide approaches for engaging different women leaders to build support for women’s empowerment and equality.

GBV is a barrier to women’s participation in leadership roles, and it is therefore very important to work with community leaders to address the imbalance of power between men and women to start removing barriers to women’s participation in leadership.

Cultural and social norms can prevent women from participating in formal leadership roles and opportunities. For example, norms limiting women’s mobility mean they may not be able to participate in training away from their community. Further, patriarchal structures and systems upheld by law, religion, social and cultural norms may not recognize or value women’s leadership and discriminate against women who do assume leadership roles. It is therefore beneficial to engage with the wider community to foster a more enabling environment for women’s leadership.

Women leaders have multiple responsibilities within the household, family and community which can constrain their availability and participation. Activities for engaging women leaders or promoting women’s leadership should be planned with consideration of women’s paid and unpaid commitments and responsibilities, including childcare, care for other family and community members, domestic and household duties. It is important to explore these realities and practicalities with women, and identify how, where, and when to schedule activities in a way that doesn’t add to women and girls’ workload. Arranging childcare and transportation can also help enable women and girls to participate in leadership development activities.

Efforts to support women leaders should build women’s and girls’ access to peer networks and mentorship. Women’s empowerment is critical to women’s leadership, and relationships are an important part of empowerment. Relationships, including relationships with peers, affect women’s access to leadership roles and their ability to actively participate in leadership opportunities.⁸ GBV staff can help women leaders and future leaders foster supportive relationships to help women to act together.

Resources may be required to support women leaders. While some activities may be able to be carried out within existing program or community resources, it may be necessary to allocate funding to activities and initiatives to help develop and foster women leaders’ skills and networks.⁹

Analysis of context-specific challenges, constraints, strengths, and opportunities for women leaders will help determine the most effective entry points and approaches to supporting women leaders. During community leader mapping (see **Building a Foundation**), GBV teams collect information about women and adolescent girl leaders in the community, including those representing diverse or marginalized groups of women and girls. Understanding the different challenges women leaders face, including specific challenges of leaders representing marginalized groups, will enable GBV teams to more effectively engage and support the work of formal and informal women community leaders.

⁸ Pathways of Women’s Empowerment Research Programme Consortium. *Empowerment: A journey not a destination*. Retrieved from https://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/PathwaysSynthesisReport_0.pdf

⁹ UN Women. *Turning Promises Into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2/2018/gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development#2018-view>

Approaches

Three potential approaches to supporting women leaders to foster women and girls' empowerment and equality are outlined below. The ideas presented here, and under ideas for engagement, are not exhaustive, but include: 1) Supporting women in leadership roles, 2) Supporting emerging leaders, 3) Creating an enabling environment for women's leadership.

Which approaches and strategies the GBV team adopts will depend on a variety of factors including:

- Context and appropriateness
- Length of time and resources available.
- Perspectives, needs and priorities of women leaders and other women and girls in the community.

Supporting Women in Leadership Positions

The types of support that women in existing leadership roles find helpful will vary by context and by individual. As a first step, GBV teams can ask women leaders what kinds of support might be helpful, making clear what you can and can't offer. Interviewing women in different leadership positions can help to learn more about women leaders' challenges and priorities, as well as the types of interventions that might address their needs and interests.

Supporting Emerging Leaders

Through their work with communities, GBV teams may come to know women with great potential for leadership, or informal women leaders who could be better integrated into formal, decision-making structures, or adolescent girls who are striving for positive change. Exploring opportunities to support these women and girls as emerging leaders can empower individuals and strengthen community development.

Fostering an Enabling Environment for Women's Leadership

GBV teams can help build a safer and more conducive environment for women's leadership by working to reduce barriers and increase enablers. Fostering a more enabling environment for women's leadership will help to increase leadership opportunities for women, empower women already in leadership positions, and strengthen acceptance and potential of women leaders in the community. GBV teams can adopt a benefits-based approach to highlight positive outcomes of women's leadership for whole communities.



Example from Practice

A GBV program manager described her team's experience working with women and male traditional leaders to transform the leadership structure in communities in the Far North of Cameroon:

"When we started the program five years ago, we only worked with women as participants in program activities. But in the communities where we worked, we identified some informal women's associations and bold women who provide support to women no matter their challenges. In each community, we helped these women organize into groups of ten, and we helped the groups register with the ministries as formal CBOs. This helped the women gain strength and recognition, with less exposure for each individual. Their husbands were also more supportive of their efforts once they belonged to recognized CBOs, and many joined "husbands' schools" focused on supporting women's empowerment and issues identified by women.

When we piloted this Toolkit, we spent more time engaging the traditional leaders, who have always only been men. After trainings and discussions, the leaders of two communities agreed to welcome heads of the women CBOs into the traditional leadership structure. When cases of GBV are referred to traditional courts in those communities now, the cases are managed by these new leaders, the CBO women. They make sure that cases are handled carefully, and not in open space like other cases. They support the women to meet their immediate needs and refer them to the GBV program, and they help the survivors register complaints with the Ministry of Justice."

Ideas for Engagement

Supporting Women in Leadership Positions

Training to Strengthen Knowledge and Skills
Peer Networks and Forums
Fundraising and Partnership
Recognition and Awards

Supporting Emerging Leaders

Leadership Training
Socio-Civic Empowerment
Savings and Loans Initiatives
Support for Adolescent Girls
Mentorship

Fostering an Enabling Environment for Women's Leadership

Addressing Barriers to Women's Leadership
Advocating with Leadership Structures
Group Discussions on Women's and Girls' Leadership
Outreach and Awareness-Raising

Training to Strengthen Knowledge and Skills

GBV teams can engage women leaders to provide trainings related to different areas of GBV, as covered in other sections of this Toolkit. GBV teams can also talk with dedicated women leaders to identify additional areas of knowledge, or skills they would like to develop, to strengthen their capacity for community leadership. GBV teams can consider including a flexible budget in program plans to organize trainings for women leaders, according to their needs. Then, based on the results of consultations with women leaders, teams can procure the services of expert facilitators, as needed. It is likely that women leaders might benefit from trainings outside the expertise of GBV programs, so organizing trainings with expert facilitators can provide opportunity for GBV teams and women leaders to learn together. Training topics that might be relevant include:

- International human rights
- International humanitarian law
- National laws
- Advocacy
- Communication skills
- Organizational management
- Financial management
- Fundraising

Peer Networks and Forums

GBV teams can help to create peer networks linking women leaders within the community or across communities, based on their roles as leaders or specific areas of interest or priorities. Peer support forums can enable women leaders to develop relationships, discuss challenges and frustrations, share ideas, and establish new plans or strategies for achieving goals. In settings where women have safe access to technology, peer networks can be established through virtual tools, though in-person meetings are recommended for initial relationship-building where this is possible. GBV programs can budget for forums to bring women leaders together, providing transportation or refreshments during meetings. They can also consider organizing exchange visits, where women leaders from different communities or even different countries can meet to exchange experiences and ideas. Broadening networks and exposure to different experiences can be empowering, particularly as women leadership is often limited within communities.

- Host a regular forum for women leaders within a community
- Bring formal and informal women leaders together
- Organize meetings between women leaders and local or national women-led organizations/ women's associations
- Facilitate exchange visits between communities/countries
- Connect women leaders through shared a shared technology platform

Fundraising and Partnership

Women leaders have an intimate understanding of the needs of their communities and are often at the forefront of GBV prevention and response. Still, humanitarian programming, particularly programming led by international organizations, does not sufficiently engage, or defer to the expertise of women leaders. Often, women are considered leaders by virtue of their involvement with women-led or women's rights organizations (WLO and WRO), and there is growing acknowledgement of the significant contributions of

these organizations in humanitarian response, as well as the significant barriers they face in accessing humanitarian planning, coordination, and funding mechanisms.

GBV programs, particularly those implemented by international organizations, can consider partnering with women leaders who are organized into associations or registered organizations. WLO and WRO often have goals and agendas that are broader, or longer-term, than organizations delivering GBV programs according to the humanitarian program cycle. It is therefore important for GBV programs to engage WLO and WRO to explore areas opportunities for collaboration related to mutual areas of concern. Any partnership should serve the interests of WLO and WRO and should not detract from their mission and purpose. When international organizations and GBV programs simply fund WLO and WRO to deliver on preestablished activities, they risk undermining rather than empowering these groups. GBV programs can organize meetings to understand WLO and WRO goals, discuss potential collaboration, and jointly plan program activities in equal partnership. Organizations delivering GBV programs can invest in WLO and WRO not only to deliver on mutually planned interventions, but also to strengthen the organizations. Through partnership, GBV programs can also help WLO and WRO more fully participate in humanitarian coordination and access additional funding sources, including country-based pooled funds.

GBV teams can access online trainings and resources related to humanitarian coordination and pooled funding mechanisms in multiple languages through the [Building a Better Response initiative: Building a Better Response](#).

➔ See [Template: CBO Information](#) in Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources.

Recognition and Awards

Throughout history and still globally, women are not sufficiently recognized for their substantial contributions to community wellbeing and development. In some contexts, women leaders maintain a low profile for security reasons, or to remain effective in their leadership without upsetting men-centered leadership structures. GBV programs can engage with women leaders to understand their preferences in terms of visibility. Where possible and appreciated, an easy way for GBV teams to raise the profile of women leaders is to publicly recognize and appreciate their contributions to the community. Recognition can be in the form of quoting, acknowledging, or thanking women leaders in meetings, during interviews or radio spots, at edutainment events, or through other public venues. GBV teams can also nominate women leaders for representation, recognition, and awards at national and even international levels.

Recognizing and awarding women leaders is beneficial not only to demonstrate appreciation, but to raise awareness and build support for women's leadership, and to motivate and inspire emerging leaders, including girls.

Leadership Training

GBV programs can engage current and emerging women leaders in leadership training that applies an intersectional feminist approach. Through training, women and adolescent girls can reflect on existing leadership structures and characteristics of effective leaders, explore opportunities to strengthen networks and collective power, and identify skill and knowledge areas to develop. GBV teams can help to organize additional trainings for emerging leaders, based on commonly identified needs.

GBV programs can explore different options to offer leadership training. Ideally, leadership training can be facilitated or co-facilitated by recognized women and girl leaders, WLO or WRO. GBV programs implemented by international organizations can partner with and support women leaders to deliver or co-facilitate trainings.

➔ See *Training Manual*

Socio-Civic Empowerment

Socio-civic empowerment is fostered through activities and services that enhance women's and girls' participation in public life, as well as opportunities to mobilize and organize for social change.¹⁰ GBV programs can implement a range of activities that provide opportunities for women and girls to expand their social networks, form supportive and strategic relationships, and enhance their collective power. In humanitarian settings, dedicated safe spaces for women and girls provide critical space for this dimension of empowerment. In fact, one of the five standard and required objectives of women and girls' safe spaces (WGSS), as outlined in the [Women and Girls' Safe Spaces Toolkit](#), is to provide a place where women and girls are safe and encouraged to use their voice and collectively raise attention to their rights and needs.

Activities that foster socio-civic empowerment can be particularly beneficial for emerging women leaders. GBV teams can consult with women and girls to identify appropriate and creative options, including but not limited to the following:

- Organize discussions and meetings to review priorities for women and girls in the community.
- Support the establishment of women's/girls' forums or associations.
- Host peer networking events.
- Organize skill-building opportunities, where women and girls can make connections through shared learning.
- Organize community development projects, where women can build relationships through shared initiatives.
- Orient women and girls to humanitarian coordination mechanisms and help them connect with organizations and systems to advocate for their needs.¹¹
- Host public events for women and girls to share concerns and ideas.

GBV programs can read more about socio-civic empowerment and find ideas for related activities in International Rescue Committee and International Medical Corps' Women and Girls Safe Space Toolkit: [Women and Girls Safe Spaces \(gbvresponders.org\)](#).

"I am a woman but I am a leader. I am a center point for the community. Women and men come to me for guidance, advice, and information, and I work hard to make sure everyone knows about the needs women and girls share with me and that the community upholds and respects women's rights."

– A community volunteer and active member of a WGSS in Lebanon

¹⁰ International Rescue Committee and International Medical Corps. *Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings*, 2020, p. 397.

¹¹ International Rescue Committee and International Medical Corps. *Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings*, 2020.

Savings and Loans Initiatives

GBV programs can support women's social and economic empowerment through support of village savings and loans associations (VSLA). VSLA include groups of women (usually 15-25) who contribute savings into a collective fund from which individual members can draw loans or seek emergency assistance. Increasing women's access to financial resources can increase other opportunities for women, including opportunities to participate in leadership activities. The social and collective nature of VSLA, which require shared goals and commitments, also helps to strengthen supportive relationships and characteristics of good leadership. Further, the governance structure of VSLA allows emerging women leaders to gain experience in democratic processes as well as transparent and inclusive decision making.

GBV programs can support existing VSLA within their communities or identify emerging women leaders within VSLA to support through other interventions. GBV programs interested in initiating VSLA can partner with organizations that specialize in livelihoods interventions, or implement an established VLSA program, such as the International Rescue Committee's Economic and Social Empowerment (EA\$E) approach, which is specifically designed for GBV programs. The EA\$E framework includes three successive components: 1. Women-only VSLA, 2. Gender discussion groups with partners or spouses of VSLA members to explore gender norms and household-level financial management, and 3. Business skills training.

GBV programs can learn more about International Rescue Committee's EA\$E framework here: [EA\\$E Approach \(gbvresponders.org\)](http://gbvresponders.org)

Support for Adolescent Girls

Adolescent girls experience discrimination and violence related to both their age and gender and are highly vulnerable to GBV in humanitarian settings. Some forms of GBV, such as early/forced marriage and female genital cutting, are largely perpetrated against adolescent girls. GBV programs that center girls in program design and implementation are able to tailor interventions to meet the specific needs and interests of adolescent girls. Tailored interventions can also help to promote girls' leadership in communities and expand opportunities for girls as future leaders of communities and nations.

GBV programs can consider program interventions that are deliberate in working with girls as emerging leaders, by building girls' skills in leadership, advocacy, and communication, as well as by partnering girls with mentor leaders.

GBV programs can also center adolescent girls' rights and needs in other interventions, such as promotion of girls' education, access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and prevention of early/forced marriage. While such interventions are not directly focused on girls' leadership, girls' involvement in directing such interventions can build leadership skills. Strengthening support and opportunities for adolescent girls, and preventing GBV, also increases girls' autonomy and potential, including their potential for future leadership.

Practical resources and tools for supporting adolescent girls to increase their opportunities and leadership:

- The IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises (2020) include an annex with *recommendations for supporting young women's leadership* (page 200): [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-02/IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-02/IASC_Guidelines_on_Working_with_and_for_Young_People_in_Humanitarian_and_Protracted_Crises_0.pdf)
- The International Rescue Committee has developed several programming approaches for GBV programs in humanitarian settings to more effectively engage adolescent girls, including *Girl Shine*, an adolescent girl life skills program, and *Girl Empower*, a mentorship program. International Rescue Committee's resources on supporting adolescent girls can be accessed here: [Adolescent Girls \(gbvresponders.org\)](https://www.gbvresponders.org/)
- The Women's Refugee Commission has published reports and guidance related to meeting needs of adolescent girls in emergencies, including the I'm Here approach for inclusive humanitarian programming with adolescent girls and *Strong Girls, Powerful Women: Program Planning and Design for Adolescent Girls in Humanitarian Settings*. Resources are available at: [Protection and Empowerment of Adolescent Girls | Women's Refugee Commission \(womensrefugeecommission.org\)](https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/)
- Rise Up has developed a curriculum and advocacy tools under its *Let Girls Lead* initiative, primarily delivered in development contexts: [Let Girls Lead - Rise Up \(riseuptogether.org\)](https://www.riseuptogether.org/)
- Population Council offers a straightforward toolkit that has been used in humanitarian settings. *Girl Centered Program Design: A Toolkit to Develop, Strengthen and Expand Adolescent Girls Programs*. (2010): <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/girl-centered-program-design-a-toolkit-to-develop-strengthen-and-expand-ado>.

Mentorship

GBV programs can help connect emerging women and girl leaders with mentors. A mentor is not a supervisor or authority figure, but rather an experienced advisor who is willing to share support and guidance. Women and adolescent girls who demonstrate potential and interest in leadership can volunteer to serve as mentors. GBV programs can help to promote mentorship in different ways, including:

- Invite mentors to participate in, or lead, specific interventions, such as life skills sessions, or group discussions.
- Share contacts of mentors with program participants, through WGSS or specific interventions such as life skills classes.
- Connect participants of VSLA or other livelihoods interventions with mentors who have been successful in relevant areas of work.
- Introduce a mentorship initiative where mentors are paired with mentees and agree on plans for communication and setting goals.



Example from Practice

Mentorship in Cameroon

A GBV program serving internally displaced people and host communities in the Far North of Cameroon introduced a mentorship initiative, where young women aged 19-25 who were committed to girls' education and interested in developing their leadership potential volunteered to mentor young mothers and adolescent girls. They participated in monthly coaching sessions on leadership and agreed to serve as role models, not only for the young women and girls they mentored, but for the larger community.

➔ See [Sample Template: Mentorship Action Plan](#) in *Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources*

Addressing Barriers to Women’s Leadership

Globally, women’s leadership is constrained to varying degrees by a number of common factors. To strengthen a supportive environment for women’s leadership, GBV teams can help to identify specific factors within their community that limit women’s involvement in leadership, as well as enabling factors that might be reinforced. After mapping leadership structures, as part of **Building a Foundation for Engagement**, GBV teams can consult with women and men leaders, as well as women and adolescent girls, to gain a better understanding of barriers to women’s participation in public affairs, formal leadership structures, and community-level decision making. By talking with women leaders and women and girls interested in leadership, GBV teams can further identify factors that might encourage or enable their participation.

Based on the outcome of participatory learning, GBV teams can identify actions to strengthen an enabling environment for women’s leadership. Where possible, GBV teams should strengthen efforts already underway in the community, including WLO or WRO-led initiatives, and any work by community leaders to enhance equality and inclusion in leadership structures.

➔ See **Information Sheet: Addressing Constraints on Women’s Participation in Leadership** in *Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources*

Advocating with Leadership Structures



Example from Practice

A GBV program manager described her experience advocating for women’s inclusion in community decision-making in the Kivus, in the Democratic Republic of Congo

“In the communities where we worked, it was really challenging. We were asking leaders to adjust their traditional justice mechanisms to address GBV, and we were advocating for women’s involvement in the decision-making space. They have to change, and change is not easy. It was important to show community leaders the advantage of changing. They had to see their social norms, and to understand GBV and how this is a problem. We weren’t against their beliefs; but against norms that perpetuate GBV. We didn’t directly ask for women to be more involved with decision-making. First, we gathered women and asked about the issues they faced. Many women spoke about how violence was directly related to marriage practices and other traditions. They would say “this happens because in our culture...” Then, we met with male community leaders and asked them to describe the issues women faced. The leaders spoke about general problems in the community—like water, and health needs. They mentioned violence against women and girls, but only rape perpetrated by armed groups outside the community. When we told them about the issues women raised, they were so surprised. It was the opportunity to talk about GBV. Once they understood more about the problem, and that this is a problem for women, we talked about how such issues could be addressed. Then they agreed that women would need to be more involved.”

GBV programs that recognize a gap in women’s participation and decision-making may identify opportunities to engage existing leaders to advocate for greater inclusion of women. As with other areas of advocacy, GBV teams can apply a strengths-based approach, recognizing leaders’ important roles in protecting communities and addressing community problems, and focusing on the benefits of women’s inclusion in leadership. Depending on the context, GBV teams can explore different options for greater inclusion of women. While some leadership structures may be more flexible than others, experience demonstrates that most structures adapt and change with time and new circumstances, including emergencies and displacement.

➔ See **Planning Tool: Advocacy with Leaders** in *Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources*

Group Discussions on Women’s and Girls’ Leadership

GBV teams can organize group discussions on women’s and girls’ leadership as part of an assessment of barriers and enabling factors, or to contribute to a process of strengthening support for women’s leadership. When the purpose of discussions is to strengthen the enabling environment for women’s leadership, it can be helpful to organize a series of dialogues with the same groups. Through a series of dialogues, community members can identify actions that can be taken to strengthen support for women leaders, as well as actions that can reduce barriers and expand opportunities for emerging women leaders.

When engaging community leaders in group discussions, consider the composition of groups. Think strategically about the purpose of discussions and who to include in different discussions. Teams can adapt questions and discussion prompts for groups of current or emerging leaders and groups of other participants.



Example from Practice

Bringing religious leaders and women leaders together

A GBV program in Timbuktu, Mali made a practice of conducting training sessions and group discussions on different topics jointly with male religious leaders and informal women leaders. Joint discussion groups provided new opportunities for women to speak in the presence of religious leaders and helped to build religious leaders’ acceptance of women’s participation in community affairs. Over time, the program recognized increased confidence among women leaders to speak out about issues during group discussions.

➔ See **Discussion Guide: Exploring Potential and Benefits of Women’s Leadership** in *Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources*

Outreach and Awareness-Raising

GBV programs can consider using communication channels to promote values that support women's leadership and raise awareness of the benefits of women's leadership for communities. Increasing awareness through radio, tv, social media, art, theater, or IEC materials can help to normalize women's leadership and strengthen support for current and emerging leaders. Any outreach or awareness-raising activities should be well-coordinated with women leaders, to ensure activities are in line with their interests and to review risks of backlash.

GBV programs can also collaborate with women leaders to take leading roles in awareness-raising activities, including during GBV campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism. GBV programs can help to support women-led initiatives, through staff time, financial support, transportation, or other resources.



Example from Practice

Awareness-raising in Central African Republic

In communities where men were reluctant to listen to women and most didn't accept women's leadership, a GBV program integrated women into protection committees. For outreach activities, only male facilitators were able to bring groups of men together to talk about protection issues. The easiest thing was to divide women and men and always have men lead male discussion groups, but the program thought it was important for men to hear from women, so they organized two-person facilitation teams, with one woman and one man. The male facilitator helped to gather men and then gave space for the woman to lead much of the discussion. With this practice, the men were willing to participate, and they were able to learn something-- not only about the topics discussed, but also about women's potential for leadership.

➔ See **Talking Points: Women's Leadership** in *Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources*

Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources

Tools and Resources

- [Template: Community-Based Organization \(CBO\) Information](#)
- [Template: Mentorship Action Plan](#)
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Training Modules

- *Training Modules: Women's Leadership*

Template: Community-Based Organization (CBO) Information

This template is designed for GBV programs to collect initial information about potential programming partners in humanitarian settings. Questions can be adapted and largely relate to community-based organizations, including women-led organizations (WLO) and women's rights organizations (WRO). **Questions highlighted in pink can be addressed to more informal women's associations.** Note that information captured here will not be sufficient for program planning, which should involve a collaborative process foundational to an equal partnership.

Name

Please provide the full name of your organization

Registration

Is your organization registered? Please provide information on registration: date, type of organization, validity of registration

Leadership

Who leads your organization? Please explain if the organization is led by a single person, a committee, or a different structure. Please also indicate if the leadership is composed of men, women, a combination of women and men, and if the leadership includes any children.

Key Contact

Please provide key contacts for your organization, including full names, titles, phone, e-mail, business address

Management Structure

Please provide information on how your organization is managed. Is there a management board? What does the organigram look like?

Partners

Does your organization have formal partnerships with any other implementing organizations?

Donors

Have any donors recently supported your organization? Which ones?

Geographic Coverage

Where does your organization work? How many communities/people does your organization reach in its area/s of operation?

For areas of operation relevant to potential partnership, please provide information below on your membership.

Staffing/Volunteer Information	Total Number	Female	Male
Paid, full-time members			
Paid, part-time members			
Working volunteers (indicate average hours of work per week)			
Affiliated members (not contributing to work)			

Mission and values?

What is the overall mission of your organization? What is your cause

Type of Work

What major sectors of work does your organization engage in? For example, are you focused on health? Livelihoods? Assistance to children? Women's rights?

For Women and Girl-Focused Organizations

Please indicate which activities best describe the focus of your organization (check those that relate to major activities).

- Advocacy to reform laws/policies
- Raising awareness of women's or girls' rights within communities
- Stopping specific practices that harm women or girls
- Raising funds/donations for vulnerable women or children
- Savings or loans associations of women
- Training women or adolescent girls in new trades/livelihoods
- Informal education/literacy for women or girls
- Recreational activities for women or girls
- Support for women affected by domestic violence
- Support services for women and girls affected by violence in the community/conflict
- Support services for children
- Other

Please include more specific information below if offered:

Major Activities

Please provide information on your current projects, including information on regular activities that are carried out on a daily/weekly/monthly basis.

Typical Day...

What would be the responsibilities and activities of an active worker in your organization on a typical day?

Template: Mentorship Action Plan

Mentorship is an informal relationship where an experienced woman or woman leader (mentor) helps to guide and encourage another woman or adolescent girl (mentee). Mentor: mentee relationships can occur naturally, but when these relationships are arranged it can be beneficial to agree on preferences for meeting and communication, types of support, goals, and principles of the relationship. The following action plan be adapted to help participants of mentorship initiatives agree on the purpose and terms of their relationship.

Time Commitment:

- Agree on frequency and duration of meetings
- Agree on means of communication
- Agree on a schedule for checking in on the mentor: mentee relationship

We will prioritize the following forms of mentor support (check those that apply):

- Encouragement
- Support in problem-solving
- Advice related to learning
- Discuss challenges related to holding leadership positions
- Professional advice
- Other (please describe)
- Help in tracking progress towards achieving goals

Expectations	
Mentor	Mentee

Preferences for Style of Communication	
Mentor	Mentee

Fears or Concerns to Share	
Mentor	Mentee

Mentee Goals

The mentee can identify specific goals and then work with a mentor to consider steps to reach that goal, using the table below.

Examples:

- To learn more about a field of work
- To receive advice about my education or career path
- To strengthen my network
- To improve my communication skills
- To learn more about serving as a leader
- To seek advice about overcoming challenges

Specific Goal	Steps to Reach Goal	Support requested from mentor	Timeframe	Challenges

Terms of Relationship

We are both voluntarily entering into this mentor: mentee relationship. We agree to focus on meeting the mentee’s goals. We agree to build a trusting and honest relationship. The mentor will provide constructive feedback and advice, and the mentee will maintain an open mind. We agree to respect each other’s time and communicate respectfully. If we are not able to communicate effectively, or if either party feels the relationship is not meeting the intended purposes, we are free to discontinue the mentor: mentee relationship with respect.

Confidentiality: The details of our communication should be kept confidential and should not be shared with other parties unless mutually agreed.

Option of signatures to agreement.

Information Sheet: Addressing Constraints on Women's Participation in Leadership

What are some constraints on women's participation in leadership?

Constraints on women's participation in leadership may vary, depending on factors such as race, ethnicity, age, health, socioeconomic status, disability status, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Household work and family responsibilities- Women are responsible for a large portion of work at home. Taking care of children and family member and managing household work, often on top of work outside the home, constitutes many responsibilities and limits the time women can participate in community affairs and leadership.

Cultural and social norms or expectations- Women may be limited from participation in leadership because of strong gender roles, where men are expected to serve as leaders. In some settings, women are also not expected to move unaccompanied, speak publicly, travel, or engage in other activities that may be essential for leadership.

Stereotypes and biases- Strong gender roles can also relate to stereotypes where women are not considered to possess attributes of leadership. For example, women may be stereotyped as caring, nurturing, or indecisive, and these may not be considered qualities of strong leaders. Women may also shy away from leadership opportunities if they fear being associated with characteristics unbecoming of women.

Lack of family support- Often related to social norms and stereotypes, women's partners or family members may not approve of women's participation.

Limited representation and networks- Women lack role models in leadership and access to influential networks critical to moving up the leadership hierarchy.¹²

Gender-based violence- Pathways to leadership are minimized or blocked when women and girls face threats, sexual harassment, and other forms of GBV. Early/forced marriage, discriminatory inheritance laws and denial of critical opportunities and services, including education and family planning services, constitute significant barriers to women's participation in leadership.

Limited access to financial resources- Women experience limited financial autonomy and control over financial resources at community and household levels. This limits women's opportunities and perpetuates perceptions that women are not suited for leadership.

Practical barriers- Women are disproportionately affected by a range of barriers, including transportation, language, literacy, and physical locations of leadership venues.

¹² AAUW. (2016). *Barriers and Bias THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP*. https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/03/2020/Barriers_and_Bias_summary.pdf

Why address constraints on women's participation?

Addressing constraints helps women more fully participate in community affairs. Where women participate in leadership, community wellbeing improves.

What can be done to address constraints on women's participation?

Constraints on women's participation can be addressed in multiple ways, from high level support of lawmakers to working with families and individual women and girls.

➔ Provide training, knowledge, and skill building opportunities for women and girls

➔ Enact zero tolerance policies for sexual harassment and other forms of GBV.

➔ Promote men's participation in childcare and household work.

➔ Consult with women about the timing of meetings or leadership activities.

➔ Provide safe spaces where women can meet to build leadership strategies and networks.

➔ Promote healthy relationships and joint decision-making at the household level.

➔ Pick locations for leadership meetings that are easily accessible for women and girls.

➔ Consider providing transportation, or rotate locations to expand participation

➔ Advocate with lawmakers to change exclusionary policies and structures.

➔ Engage community leaders to understand and address constraints to women's participation in leadership.

➔ Challenge harmful social and cultural norms, stereotypes, and biases that constrain women's participation in leadership.

➔ Organize discussions and meetings to address constraints to women's participation in leadership.

➔ Establish and strengthen mentorship opportunities.

➔ Prohibit early/forced marriage and promote girls' education.

➔ Organize networking events and social opportunities.

➔ Recognize the important contributions of women serving in formal and informal leadership positions.

➔ Hold meetings in common, or multiple languages, and accommodate different literacy levels.

➔ Organize trainings on human rights and women's rights.

Planning Tool: Advocacy with Leaders

Summary of Issues and Request

Briefly, what issues are you hoping leaders will address?

Ethics & Safety

Does the staff feel safe and comfortable to meet with the leader? Yes No

Does the staff have:

- Required means of communication and transportation? Yes No
- Knowledge of available support, in case of threats or other security risks? Yes No

Purpose

What is your major ask?

What actions do you want the leader to take?

Engaged community leader/s: _____

Leader's Interests

How open is the community leader to the issue?



Open. Supportive of the GBV program and a proponent of survivor-centered response.



Partially Open. Has demonstrated interest in GBV program activities, but not known as a reliable advocate for survivors.



Closed. Not known to the GBV program and/or thought to be not supportive.

The leader will likely be most concerned about...

Key Points for Discussion

What key points- pieces of information or facts- are important to highlight?
Which facts will most appeal to the leader's interests (**see factsheets**)?

Prepare for Potential Challenges

Anticipate different perspectives and possible arguments.
How will you re-orient discussion to focus on key points?

Communication Style

Important things to remember when communicating with leader.
Specific greetings?
Has the leader made positive contributions to community safety, or to the GBV program, that you want to acknowledge?

Discussion Guide: Exploring Potential and Benefits of Women’s Leadership

Group discussions about the potential and benefits of women’s leadership can be organized with community leaders (male or female) or other community members. This discussion guide includes suggestions for arranging and leading any group discussion, followed by sample questions and important ideas for discussing women’s leadership.

Arranging Discussion Groups (ahead of discussion)

- Identify a comfortable and quiet locations for discussions.
- Limit groups to 15 participants
- Complete discussions within 1.5 hours.
- Ensure lead facilitator has experience and/or training in facilitation. The facilitator must be able to ask probing and clarifying questions, demonstrate comfort and patience when talking about sensitive issues, positively manage negative or harmful comments, and respond appropriately to disclosures of GBV.
- Have a referral list of available services in case of GBV disclosure.
- Where possible, arrange same-sex facilitators for all male or all female discussion groups.

Introduction (5-10 minutes)

- Greet everyone, share introductions, pleasantries, and gratitude for any recent positive actions.
- Share general information about your organization and program (with any new participants).
- Present the purpose of the discussion.
- Agree to not share stories that identify individuals.

Discussion (30-45 minutes)

- Introduce topic of discussion and begin with a question or other prompts.
- Be sure to review questions/prompts and adapt them for context.
- Avoid “teaching”, talking too much, or arguing. Use prompts to keep conversation going and remember the discussion is also a learning opportunity for you.
- Do not feel pressure to use all questions/prompts.

Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

- Summarize key takeaways or ideas from discussion.
- Agree on any points for further discussion and make plans as appropriate.
- Thank all participants.

Prompts/Questions

- Do you recognize women leaders in the community?
 - Probe for informal leaders, particularly where women's leadership in formal structures is limited. Do you recognize trusted women in the community? Are there women leaders within religious institutions? Among midwives? Elders? Business owners?
- What do you think about women leaders?
- Does the community benefit from women's leadership? What are the advantages?
 - Probe for advantages women might have in leadership- for example, reaching certain populations, modeling leadership for girls, representing the needs of other women.
 - Share some benefits of women leaders and share global statistics to help spark conversation. (See **Talking Points: Women's Leadership** in Supporting Women Leaders Tools and Resources)
- What are the challenges to women's leadership? What might be done to address these challenges?
- What would be required for more women to participate in leadership?
- What can we do to better balance power between male and female community leaders?

Important Ideas for Discussion

- Questions and prompts can be tailored to different interests. During an assessment, you might want to simply capture information on people's feelings toward women leaders and the presence of women leaders. If you organize group discussions focused on strengthening the enabling environment for women's leadership, you will want to probe deeper into attitudes and barriers.
- Questions and prompts can be adapted to different groups. When discussing issues of women's leadership with existing or emerging women and girl leaders, you might focus on their experiences, and the specific challenges they face.
- Remember not to be alarmed if someone raises a problematic point of view. This is likely a positive sign that you've created a safe space to air ideas, and exposing ideas is an important part of the process of change. You can note your concern or disagreement without silencing discussion. Probe further. Ask other participants to share their thoughts.

Talking Points: Women's Leadership

Talking points are brief statements that can serve as an outline or reminder of points to highlight during a discussion with different stakeholders, including community leaders. Talking points are most useful when the user is knowledgeable on issues and can engage in discussion beyond talking points.

Below are talking points for GBV teams to discuss women's leadership and the balance of power between women and men.

We cannot fully ensure the safety, wellbeing, and success of our community without women in leadership roles.

- We must all work together to help ensure the safety and wellbeing of our community by supporting women with opportunities and access to leadership roles.
- By supporting women's leadership, we are helping our community to utilize our full human potential so that we can better face current and future challenges such as pandemics, poverty, food insecurity, war, or climate change.
- Supporting women's leadership has proven to be "...critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education and wellbeing of girls and boys." (UN Sustainable Development Goals)
- To ensure the safety, wellbeing, and success of our community, we need to understand our community members needs and interests. Women leaders are best positioned to understand women and girls needs as they themselves are women and women and girls feel more comfortable discussing their needs and interests with trusted women leaders.

When women leaders are engaged in leadership roles at all levels, women, girls, and the entire community benefits!

- Women are a valuable resource with vast amounts of skills, knowledge and expertise that can benefit our communities. Elevating women into leadership roles with decision making responsibilities taps into women's skills, knowledge, and expertise which benefits politics, business, and the community.
- When women leaders are included, they can represent women and girls' best interests and participate in key decision-making processes that shape their lives and futures. The result is healthier families, increased peace and security, and greater overall community wellbeing.
- When women are engaged in leadership roles, there is greater economic, social, and political progress for all.¹³
- For example, there are lower levels of income inequality in countries that have greater numbers of women leaders in legislative positions.¹⁴
- Women's decision-making within households has been shown to improve family members access to healthcare and education¹⁵ which has a positive impact on the current and future wellbeing of the family.

¹³ Women Deliver. *Balancing the Power Equation Women's Leadership in Politics, Businesses, and Communities*, 2018. <http://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/09/2018/Women-Leadership-Policy-Brief9.23.18-.pdf>

¹⁴ OECD. *Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth*, OECD Publishing, 2014. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/en>

¹⁵ O'reilly, M. *Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies*, 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/>

A balance of power between women and men will help ensure the overall wellbeing of our community.

- Power isn't in limited supply—A balance of power simply creates more power and strength.¹⁶ If we use our power and strength together, think of how much more we can accomplish.
- We can support women's leadership, decision-making and collective action so that women and girls can control their own lives and start to transform the balance of power between men and women.
- We can transform the balance of power by making changes through our workplace. This could be through fair and equitable policies for all staff such as professional development opportunities, benefits, fair and equal wages, or zero-tolerance policies for any violence in the workplace.
- There are many opportunities for us to help transform the balance of power. We can start by addressing power dynamics in our own household; we can condemn violence against women and girls; ensure our daughters have a quality education; stop harmful practices such as early marriage; place women in roles traditionally held by men; support income generating activities and financial independence for women; and support women's inheritance rights.
- When women's lives improve, so does their decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life which has a positive impact¹⁷ on not only women, but their families and the community as a whole. To help improve women's lives and decision-making power, we need to transform the balance of power between men and women.

Promoting and supporting women's leadership starts with us.

- Promoting and supporting women's leadership starts with each one of us and how we treat women and girls in our own families and personal lives. We can do this by first reflecting on our own lives and use of power, our beliefs, values, and actions that affect how we promote and support women's leadership.
- We can examine our leadership structures, policies and practices and eliminate the barriers within those systems that directly oppose or limit women's access to leadership opportunities and positions.
- All of us can work to promote women's leadership in our communities from high level support from lawmakers to traditional leaders to working with communities, organization, religious and faith leaders, families, and individuals.
- We can help women access essential services and help create equal access to and control over resources so that women can participate in leadership opportunities.¹⁸

We can all support women's leadership by modeling balance of power in the community.

- We can celebrate women's leadership and accomplishments with the community through awareness raising, campaigns, social media, discussions with families, friends, community members, and leaders.
- We can ensure equitable power within our own homes, with families and friends, and in our workplace by listening to one another, treating one another with respect and kindness and working together.
- We can ensure women are invited to and included in decision making spaces.
- We can help take on duties within the home that are traditionally completed by women and girls so that they don't miss out on important opportunities such as education, trainings, running for or holding political office, etc.
- We can model balance of power in our homes for our children to see and learn from. Parents play an important role in shaping their children's beliefs and seeing a balance of power between men and women in their families can help to change their beliefs about women's leadership.

¹⁶ Raising Voices. *SASA! Together: An activist approach for preventing violence against women*, Kampala, Uganda, 2020.

¹⁷ UNFPA. *Women Empowerment*. UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund, (n.d.). Issue 7. <https://www.unfpa.org/pcm/node/9551>

¹⁸ WFP Gender Office. *Gender & Participation*, 2019. Retrieved from <https://gender.manuals.wfp.org/en/gender-toolkit/gender-in-programming/participation/>