



Recommendations on Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Middle East and North Africa Regional
Policy Dialogue



What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls: Impact at Scale

A seven-year initiative funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to scale up evidence-based, practice-informed prevention of violence against women and girls. The programme will invest £67.5 million to prevent and contribute to eliminating violence against women and girls (VAWG) by:

- Systematically designing, implementing, and rigorously evaluating a range of approaches to scaling up violence prevention efforts, translating proof-of-concept evidence into robust, large scale programmes and strategies.
- Designing, piloting, and testing new theory-driven violence prevention approaches (innovation).
- Strengthening long-term capability and capacity to deliver cutting-edge, evidence-based violence prevention programmes across the programme's grantees, the UK Government (principally FCDO), and developing country governments
- Using evidence to influence a more effective, scaled-up global response to end VAWG.

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Background

On November 29th, 2021, the *What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls: Impact at Scale* Programme (Phase II) was launched by the Government of the United Kingdom. *What Works* is a programme funded by the UK (United Kingdom) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Ford Foundation to scale up evidence-based efforts to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) and builds on the first phase of implementation which showed that VAWG prevention is possible. This programme is implemented by a consortium of partners: International Rescue Committee, Raising Voices, Breakthrough/SAMYA, Social Development Direct, and CARE International. CARE International co-leads the External Engagement and Influencing (EEI) pillar with Social Development Direct on behalf of consortium members which aims to strengthen the overall VAWG prevention field through increased investment and increased use of evidence.¹

Between June and August 2023, CARE Egypt approached over 30 Women Rights Organizations (WROs) in the MENA region and initiated consultations with 21 of them to plan for a regional Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Policy Dialogue event. Virtual consultations were conducted with WROs from Lebanon, Northeast Syria, Northwest Syria, South Turkey, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt.

The event took place in-person for three days from 24 to 26, September 2023, in Cairo. 13 participants were nominated to participate at the regional 3-day meeting: 4 from Egypt, 4 from Jordan, 2 from Lebanon, 2 from Palestine, and one from Northwest Syria. All organizations that participated at the dialogue identified themselves as feminist. Three more WRO representatives participated virtually in two sessions of the event; two from Lebanon and one from Yemen. The third day was open to representatives of donor organizations, UN agencies and key stakeholders from the region. Participants included representatives of the embassies of the UK, Sweden, Australia, Canada, as well as from GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), UNFPA and the regional Doria Feminist Fund. Overall, the event encompassed 17 sessions over three days, two of them included virtual presentations.



Context

The MENA region has some of the highest rates of VAWG globally.² The main root causes for VAWG in MENA are gender inequality and unequal power relationships. As per the participating WROs, harmful social norms and the cultural heritage and traditions that devalue women and esteem men, patriarchal ways of thinking, extremist religions ideologies, legislative limits and gaps, occupation and conflict, and economic instability are also perceived as causes of violence. In addition, the lack of access to resources, information, and awareness, the unequal distribution of resources, political instability/crises, lack of services in fragile settings, displacement, women's economic dependency and low labour force participation, high unemployment rates, the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters are all risk factors and drivers leading to more violence in different countries of the region. The region has witnessed an increase in the severity of violence against women (e.g. femicide against those refusing forced marriage), and new forms of violence emerged e.g., technology facilitated GBV (Gender Based Violence (TFGBV)). Patriarchal ideologies and increasing conservatism have led to the rollback of women's rights.

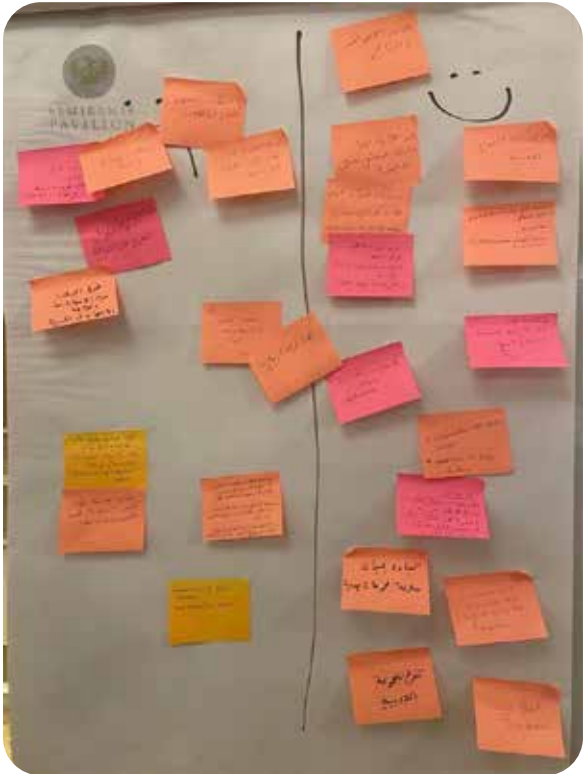
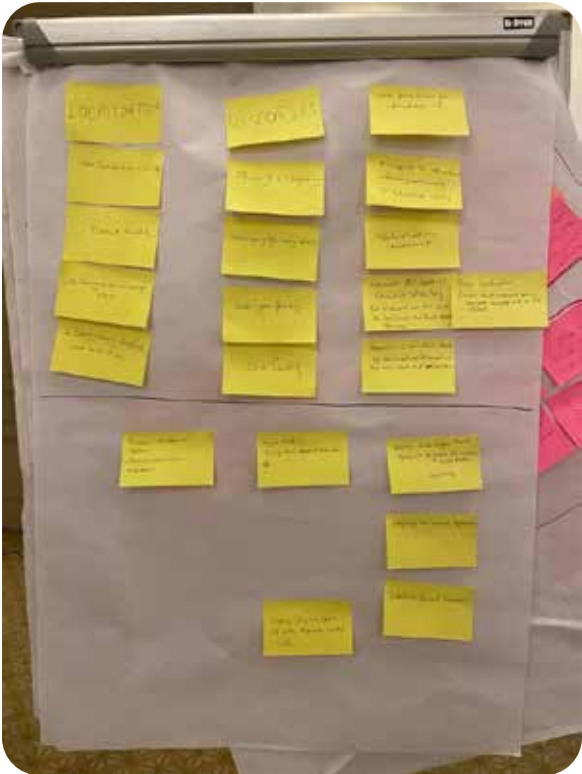
In preventing violence, WROs use different strategies that include awareness-raising of communities, security forces, youth, school children, men, etc.; youth dialogues and school programs, e.g., play-based approaches; engaging religious and opinion leaders; women empowerment and rights education; training and capacity strengthening of various networks and duty bearers; adopting a multi-sectoral approach in service provision by covering health, PSS (Psychosocial support), security, and legal sectors. They also use advocacy with policy makers and law makers on legal and policy reform; community mobilization engaging women activists and working through national and regional networks; and digital campaigns for prevention programming as part of a wider, robust prevention strategy.

The regional dialogue highlighted a significant gap in the 'global' evidence base which has limited, to no evidence drawn from the MENA region. This results in the perception that the existing evidence base is not relevant to and inclusive of the MENA region, although in fact there are many similarities in drivers of VAWG across regional contexts. One of the key reasons for this gap in the global evidence base is language. Most global evidence reviews only cover documentation in English and the evidence base therefore is weighted towards English-speaking regions. However, for the Arab speaking countries this has led to almost complete exclusion from the globally recognized evidence base. There may also be a relative dearth of evidence from the MENA region due to under-investment in prevention, under-investment in evaluations or lack of effective approaches being implemented. Strategies cited by participants as regularly used in prevention have elements in common with effective approaches, but are likely to be strengthened by engagement with evidence and lessons from other regions as well as cross-regional learning within MENA. The questions addressed within this paper are how can WROs sustain and scale up their role in VAWG prevention strategies? How can the What Works II program and International NGOs/donor agencies support WROs in achieving effective and evidence-based prevention strategies in MENA Region?

Findings and Recommendations

Participating WROs identified a number of key challenges that impede their work. Challenges include gaps in evidence on systematic data across sectors; gaps in policies such as on the minimum age of marriage, corporal punishment, restrictions in public participation and reservations on CEDAW; gaps within legal and protection systems; barriers to accessing justice in both formal and informal institutions; and barriers related to sociocultural gender norms and expectations.³ The challenges and the barriers WROs face can be addressed by action in three key areas. 1) localization and contextualization of prevention interventions to meet local needs; 2) funding: to have direct links with local organizations, to provide flexible and multiyear funding, and to simplify the application processes and requirements; 3) recognition of the significance of local WROs in VAWG prevention in the region. Moreover, there are some opportunities that can support the role of WROs in VAWG prevention. These opportunities include the use of digital campaigns and social media in social and behaviour change communications as an approach that can support prevention, political support for women’s labour force participation programmes, active community participation at the local level, strong local women’s rights movements, and the push for legal reforms on women’s rights.

The recommendations that resulted from the regional dialogue are relevant for What Works II, women’s rights’ organizations and for donor agencies.



Recommendations for What Works programme to working with WROs in MENA on VAWG prevention

1. Offer a virtual in-depth session on the global evidence and effective prevention approaches to participants and a wider list of WROs in MENA.
2. Fund a regional women's rights network to a) develop a regional glossary of VAWG related terminology in Arabic that avoids provoking backlash and has regional applicability whilst staying true to concepts; b) review drafts of Arabic translations of What Works products before publication.
3. Translate existing key evidence and tools into Arabic.
4. Provide implementation and research grants in the MENA region to expand the evidence base.
5. Conduct outreach to other donors around the pressing need for both investment in prevention and increased evidence in the MENA region.
6. Facilitate a biannual donor learning group on VAWG prevention in the region, including direct engagement with WROs.
7. Explore regional learning and coordination mechanisms, for example the creation of a community of practice for VAWG prevention in the region or develop a mailing list on VAWG prevention in the region to share resources.

Recommendations for WROs to sustain their work on VAWG prevention in the region:

1. **Advocacy & Capacity Strengthening-** WROs to engage donors and governments on their commitments to the Call to Action (CtA) and Call to Action Field Implementation (CAFI) and hold them accountable. They can also engage national and regional networks/ platforms for advocacy and policy change and build on the existing legal frameworks to capitalize on increased support for women's rights organisations and gender equality.
2. **Adopting Evidence-based approaches in VAWG prevention-** WROs in the region have a long history in VAWG prevention, they adopt various prevention strategies; however, they need to use both qualitative indicators and quantitative indicators to measure the impact of these prevention strategies. These indicators to be applied on the four levels of the social-ecological model (individual, relationship, community, and societal). At the same time most indicators on women's rights and gender equality are generated by international agencies like the World Bank and there are no regional indicators that reflect the needs and achievement within the Arabian context. It is also important to invest time in evaluating promising prevention approaches and actively drawing on evidence of effective approaches that have been evaluated in other regions.
3. **Building Regional & Global Networks-** WROs can share experience and knowledge by engaging in regional or global platforms or initiatives.
4. **Investing in Promising VAWG Prevention Approaches-** Investing in women's labour force participation will help in eliminating the gender gap in labour force participation. Also investing in social media campaigns is an essential tool in VAWG prevention.

Recommendations for donor agencies to build effective partnerships with WROs in the region:

1. **Understanding the local Context-** Understanding VAWG dynamics and root causes is essential to prevent VAWG in the MENA region. Thus, it is important to listen to and consult these organizations on a regular basis to understand the context and what women and girls really need in order to prevent violence from occurring and to co-design VAWG prevention programmes.
2. **Using the Arabic language when addressing WROs in the region-** Conducting meetings with such WROs in Arabic and ensuring adequate translation services is essential. Translating the existing literature/ research from other regions into Arabic and sharing existing literature that is already in Arabic for knowledge sharing and learning to enhance inclusivity. Including research, for example gender analysis, as part of all VAWG prevention programming will support donors to understand the context holistically. Adapting VAWG terminology to the region for government and communities to understand concepts should be done as there are various contexts in the region (humanitarian development Nexus) that have already developed tools that need to be adapted. Contextualize existing prevention approaches for increased ownership, working with WROs.
3. **Mapping-** Where it is safe to do so, it is important to have a regular mapping exercise of services and the service providers in every country of the region to know what WROs do and where they are located with respect to prevention or response. This will help donors in scaling up existing activities and in identifying and establishing new partnerships with local WROs.
4. **Building Relationships & Fostering Accessibility-** Raise awareness on the roles and activities of INGOs and donor agencies in ending VAWG in the region and synthesize partnership modalities, approaches, selection criteria and requirements. Leverage social media and digital platforms to be more visible, accessible, and approachable to WROs. An example of spreading awareness of existing funding opportunities in the region is the GAC (Global Affairs Canada) funding for small organizations. Based on the What Works experience, multiyear funding for at least three years including the inception phase is required for prevention programming seeking social norms change.⁴
5. **Flexible & Long-Term Funding-** It is recommended to adopt flexible funding e.g. core funding approaches addressing programmes and organizations rather than short term projects, engage WROs representatives in different programming steps, adopt multi-year programming and include VAWG prevention as part of comprehensive VAWG service package. Also, considering flexibility in reporting requirements especially when it comes to informal (not formally registered) organizations.
6. **Accountability & Follow-up-** Acknowledge WROs work and provide objective feedback about their inputs whenever applicable. This will build trust and opportunities for collaboration in the future.
7. **Establishing & Maintaining Strong Relationships with National Authorities-** Building strong relationships with the national governments is crucial to sustain the work of local WROs. This could be done by understanding the local context and the accepted norms, cultural traditions, and legal framework of every country in the regions. Also, keeping an eye on governmental initiatives to support women rights and building up on them. This will lead to an environment of trust and to more collaboration between WROs and the local authorities and a sustained work of WROs. Foster bilateral talks between governments and donors would encourage governments to push for gender equality. Donors can also tie their funding to the government with the human rights record.

8. **Safety & Risk Mitigation-** Prevention is not always appropriate or possible in emergency settings, and it is also important for donor agencies to work with WROs and other local entities like the humanitarian agencies to agree on the type of action needed in emergency response. They can all work together to design safety plans and risk mitigation strategies that priorities the needs of women and girls. Women and girl safe spaces (WGSS) are good examples of tools helping women and girls to meet and mobilize.
9. **Building Regional Partnerships & Networks-** Crossing the borders and building relationships between different WROs in the region will create new learning and capacity strengthening opportunities. INGOs and Donor agencies can invest in successful local partnerships and promote regional dialogue initiatives and platforms for WROs. This can also happen through fostering collaboration and partnerships in the region between women's rights organizations governments and donors and through leveraging on existing empowerment programming in the region to expand prevention programming, for example existing labour rights programs or SIDA's VAW policy.

Recommended resources

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Endnotes

- 1 As part of implementation of the EEI pillar, CARE Egypt works with CARE United Kingdom (UK) to deliver the project activities, it is specifically responsible for the delivery of activities in the MENA region and works with CARE UK, its partners within the CARE Confederation and other What Works 2 consortium members on coordination and planning of relevant activities and interventions.
- 2 UN Woman, Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women and Girls, <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures-0>
- 3 UNICEF, Regional Report: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE MENA AND ARAB STATES REGION- A DECADE REVIEW 2010-2020, [Situational_Analysis_of_Women_and_Girls_in_MENA_and_Arab_States_Region_-_English.pdf](#) (menawomenandgirlsanalysis.org)
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