



## What Works Programme Newsletter

Issue 11 June 2025



Welcome to the June 2025 newsletter from the 'What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale' Programme which shares our latest research, evidence, policy and news on prevention of violence against women and girls.

### What's new this quarter?

- Welcoming our New Grantee Partners
- What Works II team gathers in Ethiopia for the Annual Programme Meeting
- Attending the 10<sup>th</sup> ILGA Asia Conference in Nepal
- Right to Play at CIES 2024: Championing gender-transformative learning
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- Scaling VAWG prevention: A feminist, practice-based blueprint
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## Welcoming our New Grantee Partners



### **Soul City, South Africa**

#### ***Improving prevention of violence against adolescent girls and young women***

Soul City Institute for Social Justice is an NGO based in South Africa that works to promote social justice and the rights of young women and gender minorities.

With funding from a What Works II Innovation Grant, Soul City Institute is leading a project that combines edutainment with a multi-level social and community mobilisation strategy to prevent violence against adolescent girls and young women (AGYW). The mass media component will feature a 13-episode TV drama addressing topics like IPV, consent, and statutory rape, supported by a social media campaign. To broaden reach, local radio stations will air 30-minute slots engaging youth audiences, while geo-targeted social media promotions will amplify messages.

In addition, a social mobilisation component will target the complex interplay of factors that put AGYW at increased risk of violence. This includes a curriculum delivered through Rise Young Women's Clubs, community dialogues to engage stakeholders in developing action plans, and a parenting social behaviour change programme. The research will assess whether combining mass media and community mobilisation prevents violence among AGYW and their communities, its effectiveness in changing behaviours and practices, and its role in creating an enabling legal, policy, and governance environment for sustained violence prevention.

Read more on Soul City's [website](#).

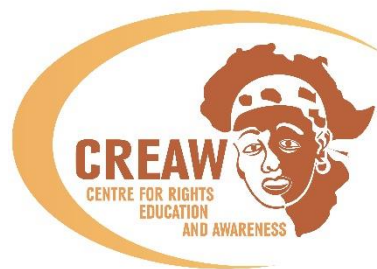


### **Reach Digital Health, South Africa**

#### ***Adopting a digital chatbot to prevent dating violence***

Reach Digital Health is an NGO based in South Africa that uses digital tools to address disparities in health services. Through a What Works II Innovation Grant, their project aims to create a scalable digital intervention for violence prevention and build local capacity to sustain its use.

Reach is partnering with Ipas South Africa – an NGO that works to increase women's access to safe, high-quality abortion, and LoveLife, a youth-focused HIV prevention NGO in South Africa, to implement an evidence-based Chatbot intervention known as 'SafeSigns', a promising modality for directly engaging girls and young women via WhatsApp, a space they consider accessible, acceptable and private.



**Changing You, Transforming All!**

### **Centre for Rights Education and Awareness, Kenya**

#### ***Addressing IPV by infusing radio and the Imarisha Mahusiano model***

The Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) is a national feminist women's rights NGO based in Kenya. CREAW is partnering with the Agency for Empowerment of Pastoralist (AFEOP) that uses participatory media, technology, and outreach activities to drive sustainable and transformative change within communities to implement the Imarisha Mahusiano couples curriculum - an adaptation of the Indashyikirwa model.

Funded by a What Works II Innovation Grant, the project aims to cultivate a culture of non-violence and respectful conflict resolution within intimate relationships by empowering couples with the skills and resources to manage conflicts without resorting to violence, contributing to the prevention of intimate partner violence.

CREAW will deliver sessions to 800 couples that emphasise the benefits of non-violent, healthy, and equitable relationships within families. The programme also includes a media component, with 22 radio drama episodes being developed with a local radio partner. Community dialogue groups will discuss radio content through facilitated sessions targeting 400 couples. Local opinion leaders will also be trained to address IPV with a training curriculum equipping them with advocacy skills.

Read more on the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness's [website](#).



They will deliver a carefully scripted, pre-tested chatbot to equip young women with skills for identifying harmful behaviours in dating relationships; encourage them to seek the social and institutional support they desire; build self-efficacy and agency to make their own choices; and foster equitable gender norms and beliefs. It also enables timely connections to psychosocial support when early signs of abuse manifest. Among older adolescents (aged 18-24), this chatbot reduced past-month violence exposure three months after use.

Read more on Reach Digital Health's [website](#).

## News from What Works



The What Works II team at the Annual Programme Meeting in Ethiopia

**What Works II Team gathers in Ethiopia for the Annual Programme Meeting** In May, the What Works II team came together in Ethiopia for a week-long learning event. Partners working in areas as diverse as education, health, and wetlands restoration shared experiences, strengthened networks, and explored opportunities for collaboration and joint advocacy.

The event created space for rich exchange across the four days. Partners shared lessons on adapting violence prevention strategies into non-traditional sectors and many spoke about working with governments to promote programme sustainability and national ownership. One highlight was testing a WhatsApp chatbot that supports adolescent girls in recognising harmful relationship dynamics and accessing help.

**Spotlight on preventing GBV at the Commission on the Status of Women** At a powerful side event during the Commission on the Status of Women, What Works II's grantee partner from Malawi, Pamodzi Kuthetsa Nkhanza (PKN), brought together a diverse panel of representatives from government, civil society, and human rights institutions. Together, they shared evidence-based approaches to preventing violence and advancing peacebuilding.

The event showcased innovative approaches to scaling GBV prevention, with a spotlight on the leadership of chiefs' wives and grassroots actors. Panellists included Maggie Kathewera Banda (WOLREC), Dr. Nephher Semphere (Ministry of Gender), Habiba Osman (MHRC), and MacBain Mkandawire (YONECO), who shared their insights on community action, policy, and legal frameworks.



We also heard updates on exciting research underway, including randomised controlled trials, implementation research, and cost-effectiveness studies.

In a sector facing constant change, this gathering was a vital moment to pause, reflect, and learn. It also served as a celebration of the progress made, and a chance to look ahead with renewed energy and a shared vision for impactful, evidence-driven prevention work.

**Attending the 10th ILGA Asia Conference in Nepal** In February, What Works II attended the 10th ILGA Asia conference in Kathmandu, Nepal. Organised by ILGA Asia, the regional branch of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association, the conference brought together over 600 LGBTQI+ activists, human rights defenders and allies to connect, strategise and exchange knowledge on LGBTQI+ rights activism and advocacy in the region.

The What Work's team attended pre-conferences, workshops and panels that explored progress made for LGBTQI+ rights in the region, while at the same time recognising the challenges that remain. These spaces provided invaluable opportunities to learn from LGBTQI+ activists on critical issues such as the need to ensure an LGBTQI+ inclusive response to the climate crisis, and how to promote equality and accountability in partnerships between LGBTQI+ led organisations and non-LGBTQI+ organisations.

We were excited to connect with organisations that work on LGBTQI+ rights and gender-based violence, an area that is too often under-explored. Among other things, LBQ organisations highlighted the need to better understand the intersection of gender-based and SOGIESC-based (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) discrimination, and the importance of continued cross-movement alliances and strategies to combat this. Participants also spoke about the importance of self- and collective care practices to sustain this work.

**Right To Play at CIES 2025: Championing gender-transformative education** Right To Play joined over 3,000 global education leaders at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Conference in Chicago, themed "Envisioning Education in a Digital Society." The team presented on gender-transformative, whole-school approaches to address school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), sharing evidence from the What Works I programme on how play- and sport-based interventions can shift social norms, reduce violence, and improve student well-being.

Amid conversations on digital learning, decolonising development, and the current funding landscape, the conference also highlighted the urgent need to localise decision-making and invest in long-term, community-based solutions. Discussions emphasised the growing interest in social-emotional learning (SEL), psychosocial support, and flexible education models—particularly in crisis-affected settings.

The key takeaway: to truly achieve impact, the education sector must prioritise teacher well-being, centre local voices,

Key discussions focused on cross-sector collaboration, scaling successful interventions, and ensuring women and girls are central to peacebuilding. The event concluded with an open forum and a vote of thanks from the Malawi Ministry of Gender, reaffirming the importance of united efforts in ending GBV globally.

**New systematic review on microfinance and VAWG prevention** The What Works II programme has recently published a thought-provoking systematic review in BMJ Global Health, which examines how microfinance interventions affect violence against women and girls (VAWG) in low- and middle-income countries. The findings reflect a complex and nuanced landscape: while some microfinance programmes can reduce VAWG, overall results are mixed. Around 60% of interventions had no measurable effect, and a small number even showed unintended harm due to backlash or repayment stress.

The review also found that combining microfinance with gender or empowerment programming does not consistently improve outcomes, underscoring the need for more rigorous, context-specific evaluation. Promising approaches include group-based savings models and male partner engagement when implemented well.

This review is a call to action for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to refine how economic empowerment is leveraged to reduce violence and to better understand for whom, how, and under what conditions these programmes work.

Read the full evidence review [here](#).

**New evidence on GBV in conflict settings** A new systematic [review and meta-analysis](#) offers the most comprehensive estimates to date on GBV in conflict-affected settings. Drawing on 45 studies, it finds that 39% of women and girls have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime, and 24% in the past year—figures that exceed global averages. By contrast, 11% reported non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) during conflict.

The findings challenge a narrow focus on NPSV in humanitarian settings and highlight the need for greater attention to IPV. Peer-reviewed studies reported consistently higher prevalence than data from Demographic and Health Surveys, especially for sexual violence, pointing to potential underreporting in large-scale surveys.

This review is a critical reminder that GBV programming in conflict settings should address violence within the home, not just violence associated with conflict. Improved data collection, ethical methods, and survivor-centred approaches are essential to shaping effective responses.

**Linking water management and GBV prevention in the MENA region** The What Works II Ending Violence Against Children Helpdesk is supporting four water management projects in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt to integrate GBV prevention into their work through targeted technical assistance.

These teams recognise that although women's participation in water management is essential for effective climate adaptation, IPV can limit women's engagement. Climate-related stress, such



and move beyond short-term interventions toward sustainable, inclusive change.

**Designing IPV Trials: Rethinking Baseline Surveys in Cluster RCTs** A [recent blog by the World Bank](#), using evidence from the What Works team, explores why repeated cross-sectional surveys, rather than traditional panel data, may be a better fit for some cluster-level randomised controlled trials (RCTs), especially those evaluating IPV interventions. While panels offer statistical power and can track individual-level change, they pose ethical and logistical challenges in violence research. Repeated surveys can risk participant safety, influence behaviour or disclosure, and become prohibitively costly in mobile populations.

Using repeated cross-section surveys, where different groups of people are surveyed at different points in time, can reduce respondent burden and bias. However, this approach also raises some questions about the utility of a baseline, as well as introducing risks that the people surveyed over time may be too different from one another. Even so, baseline data can still be useful in helping researchers decide how to select and organise survey participants and adjust for differences between communities. The main trade-off is losing the ability to track changes in individual people over time, which can limit the strength of the findings, especially for outcomes like IPV, where individual experiences tend to stay consistent over time.

The authors also consider a hybrid rotating panel design, blending follow-up with both new and returning respondents, which offers insights into attrition and bias, but with its own trade-offs. Ultimately, the decision hinges on expected intra-cluster correlations, logistical realities, and ethical imperatives. The blog is a practical resource for researchers designing RCTs in sensitive contexts like GBV.

**Scaling VAWG prevention: A feminist, practice-based blueprint** A new report from the [What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale](#) programme lays out six critical lessons for scaling violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevention in ways that are feminist, ethical, and grounded in real-world evidence. While we now know VAWG is preventable, the evidence base remains limited—especially for interventions that operate at community or population levels and in diverse contexts.

The report calls for deeper investment in practice-based learning, flexible funding, and long-term, equitable partnerships—especially with women's rights organisations (WROs). It also stresses the need to shift power: moving beyond INGO-led scaling to approaches that centre local knowledge, shared ownership, and feminist accountability.

Donors and implementers are urged to rethink scale—not just as expansion, but as a transformative process that embeds prevention into systems, policies, and communities. The message is clear: to move from proof-of-concept to widespread impact, we must scale differently—and scale with care.

as water shortages, can also increase household tensions and the risk of IPV.

In response, the projects are integrating a couples curriculum focused on preventing IPV. The curriculum promotes non-violent coping strategies, improves communication skills, and challenges harmful gender norms, especially around women's roles in decision-making.

This is supported by two additional components:

- An economic empowerment initiative to strengthen women's business skills
- A discussion series with water management committee leaders to promote women's involvement

The teams have been adapting the curriculum to local contexts and preparing for implementation. In June, they'll facilitate a week-long Training of Trainers, hosted by the Helpdesk, to begin rolling out this innovative, integrated approach.

**Preventing CRSV: Evidence shows it's possible** A [landmark report from the What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale](#) programme challenges the assumption that [conflict-related sexual violence \(CRSV\) is inevitable](#). It presents a high-level synthesis of existing evidence and practice on CRSV and other forms of VAWG in conflict-affected settings, based on a detailed literature review and consultations with humanitarian stakeholders and survivors' groups and networks. The report highlights that while rigorous data remains limited, CRSV is preventable with the right interventions and political will.

Key insights point to the promise of well-designed, community-based social norms programmes, risk-mitigation initiatives, and gender-transformative economic empowerment approaches. However, much of the evidence relates to broader forms of violence against women and girls, and there remain considerable evidence gaps on what works to prevent CRSV specifically.

The report highlights the urgent need for investment in adapted and rigorously evaluated programming. It also calls for immediate action to integrate CRSV prevention into humanitarian responses, strengthen survivor-centred services, engage security actors, and support women-led peacebuilding. It urges greater political commitment to address root causes like gender inequality, alongside targeted research to close critical knowledge gaps. The message is clear: CRSV is not inevitable—it is preventable.





## 60 Second Meet

**Name:** Aqsa Khan

**Project Role:** Senior Technical Advisor on What Works II for the “Stand Together to End Sexual Harassment” (SATH) project

**Currently living in:** Islamabad, Pakistan

**What is your area of expertise?** Preventing violence against women and girls, social norms change, women's labour rights and women's right to land



**What are your hopes for What Works II?** Contribute to a socio-cultural norm shift towards preventing violence against women and girls and standing with survivors to report incidents of violence, knowing they will receive support.

**If you didn't have to sleep, what would you do with the extra time?** I would watch documentaries and global news.

**If you could instantly become an expert in something, what would it be?** A Peace Expert at global level who works as a mediator to prevent, mitigate, or resolve conflicts and promote peaceful relationships and stability in the world.

**For what are you most grateful today?** Working on the themes I am most passionate about. I love my work and am grateful that I can make a contribution.

**What is your favourite quote?** “Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women”. Maya Angelou.

## Latest Evidence and Practice-Based Lessons

### Practice-Based learning on preventing violence through education

What Works II is excited to launch the first brief in its new Practice-Based Learning (PBL) series, highlighting the day-to-day realities of violence prevention work.

While the programme continues to build rigorous impact evidence, the PBL Series captures how practitioners implement prevention activities in real-world settings. It shares insights that are often overlooked but crucial for learning and scale.

The first brief focuses on preventing violence against children, including GBV, through national education systems. Authored by Sohini Bhattacharya and Richa Singh, with support from many contributors, the brief draws on the experiences of four partners:

- Breakthrough, India
- Projet Jeune Leader, Madagascar
- Raising Voices, Uganda
- Right to Play, Pakistan

Together, they share five key lessons:

1. Partner with government for sustainability and scale
2. Develop and adapt curricula addressing VAC and GBV
3. Engage teachers and school leaders as change agents
4. Involve communities, parents, and caregivers





5. Capture and apply lessons to improve and influence programmes

The brief offers practical examples and actionable insights from each partner's work.

Read the full brief: [Integrating Violence Against Children and Gender-Based Violence Prevention into National Education Systems](#) — now live on the What Works II Evidence Hub.

## Helpdesk

The Ending Violence Against Women and Children Helpdesk has produced a number documents, along with short reports\* and expert advice to FCDO on the following topics over the last three months:

[Prevention is Possible: Global lessons on halving violence against women and girls](#)

[Orphan trafficking: Evidence review on the scale, nature and drivers of orphan trafficking, and how it increases the risks of child exploitation and abuse](#)

*\*Previous Helpdesk Reports are available [here](#)*

Are you HMG staff and want to know more about how we can help with research and advice?

Please see our [leaflet](#).

Our offer to Country offices is outlined [here](#).

**For more information contact**  
[enquiry@VAWCHelpdesk.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@VAWCHelpdesk.org.uk)

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