

© Raising Voices

Blog

19 May 2020

Building momentum for scaling-up prevention of gender-based violence: the importance of norm change initiatives at community level

Author: The Community for Understanding Scale Up

Published by: ALIGN, Community for Understanding Scale Up (CUSP)

Growing evidence over the past decade has confirmed a remarkable fact: it is possible to prevent violence against women. Thanks to the efforts of feminist activists around the world, there has been a rapid uptake of initiatives that aim to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) by major donors, UN agencies, and other global stakeholders.

supported primary prevention efforts across 10 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, aiming to improve knowledge on how to stop the violence – even in conflict settings. In March, *What Works* published its [final performance evaluation](#), pulling together key lessons emerging from the programme on effective design and implementation.

As the Community for Understanding Scale Up ([CUSP](#)), we have identified key lessons from the *What Works* portfolio that complement the collective 180 years of experience of our CUSP members as we reflect on the ethical and effective scale up of interventions that aim to change social and gender norms. And we celebrate the convergence of lessons from many actors in the field as they provide essential information to donors, programmers and researchers on how to approach, adapt and implement the scale up of programmes that really work. These lessons highlight four principles and ethics that are crucial for the effectiveness of any programme, but that are so often overlooked.

1. **Build a strong foundation**

[Staff, activists and volunteers who are well-prepared and aligned to the values that are being promoted](#) are at the heart of effective programming. Ensuring that they all have the opportunity to first internalise the values of the methodology – and then embed these throughout the capacity building process – can have a profound effect on the success of a programme. For DFID's *What Works* programme, [interventions were more successful if they had longer preparatory training and allowed time to practice](#). Sustained support for all staff, community

find all of these.

2. **Nurture collective change through critical reflection**

Behaviour change is a collective process, rather than one of individual change. The most effective programmes provide space for critical reflection and dialogue, while keeping communities at the centre of programming. *What Works* notes the importance of interactive teaching and learning. This requires a pedagogy that enables communities to affirm their positive values, relate them to human rights principles, and identify existing practices and behaviours that conflict with their vision and values.

A participatory approach is essential, rather than one that is more didactic, as are self- and collective reflection, for the absorption of values and concepts and, ultimately, the transformation of harmful norms.

3. **Engage the whole community to reach a critical mass**

Initiatives intending to work with both women and men have more success reducing VAWG than those that intended to work with either men or women alone. For example, women were involved in



Young Maasai men taking part in a body mapping exercise in Kenya.

© Martin Opondo Obwar

because the intervention evolved from an approach that targeted men and boys only. In contrast, the *SASA!*, *GREAT*, *Stepping Stones* and *Tostan* initiatives are explicit in discussing the need to engage the whole of society in a dynamic, complementary approach to reach critical mass.

As we think about scale, we should consider whose priorities and voices are included in both the development and practice of these programmes, and how we can integrate holistic community engagement, based on intersectional analysis, which recognizes that communities and women are not homogenous groups, but diverse populations with unique priorities.

4. **Ensure enough time – and enough intensity – for each initiative**

People have always believed that social norms change takes decades. Yet we now know that change can happen within programming cycles (36 months, including an inception phase for any formative research, adaptation, piloting and training), if done well, with intensity, and led by communities.

While many are eager to cut preparation or implementation time when expanding to new geographic areas and communities, programmers must maintain the time, intensity, and quality of programming at scale. Successful *What Works* interventions, such as *COMBAT* in Ghana, engaged more than 100 activists and volunteers in activities over a minimum of 18 months, as compared to

with community members.

Donors must consider investing enough from the very beginning of the scale-up of social norms change initiatives to maximise the long-term benefits. That investment should include providing financial resources for adaptation and piloting before implementation. Programmes that use shortcuts can compromise their own integrity, fidelity and ethics, and cause unintended and harmful consequences to women and communities.

We are glad to see *What Works* contribute to the growing body of evidence of VAWG prevention interventions. We also know that this work is deeply political and that we need [a vibrant, independent women's rights movement](#) to drive the process forward. And now, more than ever in the context of COVID-19 and the global rise in domestic violence through lockdown measures, we need to learn the [lessons of the global HIV response](#) to ensure well-resourced and meaningful community engagement in effective VAWG prevention.

We hope that the next phase of support from DFID – and other donors – for this work will fund and fuel the on-the-ground processes where change happens ethically, effectively and sustainably. These processes need to ensure that change is rooted in and owned by the communities for whom, to echo [Tina Wallace](#), these are not so much 'projects', but rather are very much their everyday lives.

experience in scaling social and gender norm change methodologies in various contexts. CUSP represents a unique perspective of evidence-based methodologies from organizations that have worked both autonomously and with a variety of partners to implement, adapt, and/or scale their interventions. CUSP reflects critically on what it takes to adapt and scale their methodologies effectively and ethically.

Learn more about CUSP on [the Raising Voices website](#) or write to them at info@raisingvoices.org.

ALSO ON ALIGN

3 years ago · 2 comments Norms in the news	2 years ago · 5 comments Gender norms and the coronavirus
--	---

0 Comments **ALIGN**   **Login** ▾

 **Favorite**  **Tweet**  **Share** **Sort by Best** ▾

Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS 

Name

Related resources

Blog 7 January 2022



10 things we learnt in 2021

Authors: Rachel Marcus, Emily Subden

Published by: ALIGN

Report 1 April 2021



Eastern Africa Learning Collaborative baseline assessment report

Author: Eastern Africa Learning Collaborative

Published by: Social Norms Learning Collaborative


Briefing paper 6 December 2021



Challenging violence against women in public life

Authors: Rachel George, Marianne Tøraasen, Pilar Domingo

Published by: ALIGN

Share this page    


[Contact us](#)
[Partners](#)
[Themes](#)
[Covid-19](#)



