

Building Equitable Partnerships: What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Programme

About the partnership

Introduction

The What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale Programme ([What Works II](#)) is a seven-year flagship initiative funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). It aims to test innovative approaches and scale evidence-based interventions to prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). This work builds on its predecessor What Works to Prevent Violence Programme ([What Works I](#)), which ran between 2013 and 2019 and focused on building the global evidence base around what works to prevent VAWG.

This brief case study presents an overview of the equitable partnership principles and approach adopted by What Works II. It is informed by a desk review of publicly available documents, and a consultation with Tina Musuya and Alice Kerr-Wilson, the Co-Leads for Learning Partnerships for the programme's Implementation Consortium. The Learning Partnerships Team provides long-term capacity strengthening support to the What Works II grantee-partners and other FCDO-funded projects. This support includes co-design, adaptation, implementation and ethical exit from communities, over a period of three to five years. The Learning Partnerships Team also leads on gathering and documenting practice-based learning on specific thematic issues across the programme.

Partnership structure

The programme structure is complex, and partnerships exist at different levels and between different actors, as described below, and illustrated in Figure 1:

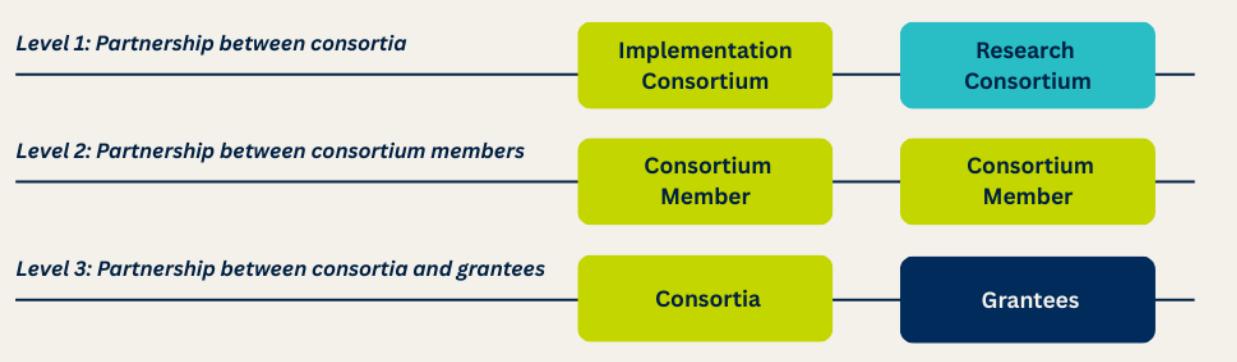
- **Partnership between consortia** – The What Works to prevent violence-Impact at scale programme is implemented by two consortia, focusing respectively on the implementation of innovation and scale-up programmes, and on the research and evaluation of these programmes. Although these consortia are made up of different partner organisations, with funding managed by different FCDO departments,¹ they engage and work closely with one another. **Partnership between consortium members** – The implementation consortium is led by the [International Rescue Committee](#) (IRC), and includes [Raising Voices](#), [Social Development Direct](#), [Samya](#), and [CARE International UK](#), with [Breakthrough](#) as a knowledge

¹ The implementation component of the programme is managed by the FCDO's Gender and Equalities Department, whereas the research component is managed by FCDO's Research and Evidence Division (RED).

partner. On the other hand, the research consortium is led [George Washington University's Global Women Institute](#), in partnership with [Johns Hopkins University](#), [The Equality Institute](#), [University of Cape Town](#) and [Aga Khan University](#). Each consortium is made up of organisations representing both the Global South and North, and is characterised by specific ways of working.

- **Partnership between consortia and grantees** – The programme provides grants to support organisations to test innovative approaches and scale effective small-scale interventions. This process, which is guided by feminist grant-making principles has resulted in funding to 14 Southern-based women's rights organisations (WROs).² Grantees are closely supported through technical assistance by the implementation consortium.

Figure 1. Key partnership levels



Partnership opportunities and learnings

The programme and its partnerships are guided by a set of feminist principles (see Annex 1), which include a commitment to shared ownership, visibility, and decision-making within the consortium.³ These principles are intentionally defined as 'aspirational', in recognition of some of the equitable partnership limitations that are common in commercial contracts (e.g., funding structure, reporting processes, and absence of core funding).⁴

The programme demonstrates the beneficial effects on partnership quality of time and resource investments during inception. When the implementation consortium was first set up, partners spent around 8-9 months building relationships and understanding the unique contribution and expertise of each organisation. To support this process, teams co-created various tools and guidance pieces focusing on different areas of the partnership, including shared values, roles and responsibilities, and ways of working. These tools were complemented by regular dialogue,

² FCDO (2023) What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale. Annual Review. Available at: <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300606/documents>.

³ <https://www.datocms-assets.com/112720/1710398102-feminist-principles-with-illustrations.jpg>.

including in-person discussions where possible. Regular opportunities for feedback, reflection, and self- and collective care have continued throughout implementation.

Where possible, the partnership has maintained flexibility in its operational model, to respond to the specific needs and organisational capacities of different partners. For instance, in response to feedback, the programme has shifted the frequency of its grantee reporting requirements from quarterly to biannually. Technical assistance and capacity building support is also available through the implementation consortium. Partners have also sought to have transparent conversations with each other as well as grantees on the level of flexibility that the programme is able to build in (e.g., around milestones), whilst recognising other areas where this may be limited by contractual requirements (e.g., funding model).

Partnership challenges and solutions

The partnership faced challenges with the phased onboarding of the two consortia. Whereas the IRC-led consortium began work in October 2021, the procurement of the research consortium was delayed due to the programming freeze resulting from the need to resource the COVID-19 response. This meant that the time available to build relationships and align ways of working within and between consortia was much more limited.

The programme has taken steps to embed accountability mechanisms to address and overcome challenges in a collective and transparent way. An accountability pillar has been set up under the implementation consortium, with the purpose of conducting periodic check-ins with consortium members and grantees and feeding back findings on what is working well and any ongoing challenges within the partnership. Over time, these conversations have resulted in tangible changes to ways of working, such as creating spaces where all partners have equal opportunities to voice their perspectives.

Annexes

Feminist principles guiding the What Works II programme

| Principle | Commitment |
|-----------------------|--|
| Gender focused | We will centre all women and girls affected by violence in all of our work, and ensure our work responds to the range of experiences of those women and girls. |
| Accountability | The What Works II Programme will first and foremost be accountable to women and girls affected by violence in the Global South. |

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| Challenge | We will use the power and resources provided by the What Works II Programme to amplify the voices of women and girls affected by violence, and to challenge systemic inequalities and patriarchal structures that perpetuate violence at all levels. |
| Intersectionality | We will adopt an intersectional approach throughout the programme, recognising the multiple sources of oppression and discrimination that affect women and girls, expose them to violence, and determine their opportunities for safety, healing and recovery. |
| Collaboration | We will work collaboratively and reflexively within the consortium and with all other organisations, individuals and groups involved in the What Works II Programme. We will create ways of working that share ownership, visibility and decision-making and challenge existing power inequalities, while recognising this is difficult work and an on-going learning process. |
| Wellbeing | We will prioritise 'doing no harm' and the safety, well-being and care of each other and all those involved in and impacted by our work. |