Foundational Elements
for Gender-Based Violence
Programming in Development

Section 1.0. Introduction

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

GBV	Gender-based violence
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those of other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
PMP	Performance management plan
PPR	Performance plan and report
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States government
WSSH	Water security, sanitation, and hygiene

What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an abuse of human rights that affects every culture and age group. The term GBV encompasses many different forms of violence and abuse—including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic. Its roots are deeply engrained in social norms that define masculinity and femininity and reinforce unequal power structures that privilege masculinity over femininity. Evidence demonstrates that GBV can be prevented, but it requires systemic and coordinated efforts.

Global bodies have recognized the seriousness and pervasiveness of GBV, as seen in their ambitious response. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit countries to end GBV by 2030. The SDGs acknowledge that ending GBV and promoting inclusive development are interconnected, and that addressing GBV improves the health and well-being of women, girls, and family members; promotes equitable political participation; and increases economic productivity and educational attainment (Kusuma and Babu 2017).

The United States government (USG) affirms that "preventing and responding to gender-based violence is a cornerstone of the U.S. Government's commitment to advancing human rights and promoting gender equality" (USAID and U.S. Department of State 2016). The 2021 United States National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality (USG 2021) includes the elimination of GBV as a top strategy to achieve the U.S. goals for gender equality and equity.

At a Glance: GBV Defined

"Gender-based Violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. GBV is typically characterized by the use or threat of physical, psychological, sexual, economic, legal, political, social and other forms of control and/or abuse. GBV impacts individuals across the life course and has direct and indirect costs to families, communities, economies, global public health, and development."

Source: USAID and U.S. Department of State 2016, 6

Who Experiences GBV?

Across the globe, women and girls, including lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women and girls, are those most frequently targeted in acts of GBV. Men and boys, especially those perceived as falling outside masculine norms, also experience GBV. Individuals who experience multiple layers of inequality may be at higher risk of GBV, such as women with disabilities, indigenous women, migrant women, and women experiencing discrimination based on race and ethnicity, and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) (Dlamini 2020) (see Box 1.1. on gender terminology).

It is important for GBV programs to use an intersectional approach, examining the ways different kinds of inequality—like race, class, ethnicity, citizenship status, and gender—can overlap, creating and reinforcing forms of discrimination or privilege and affecting the risk

of GBV. People experiencing multiple layers of inequality may also face more barriers to accessing GBV prevention and response programming and services (Imkaan 2019) (see Section 2.0. Core Principles: Core Principle #6: Intersectional). Therefore, GBV programs must be responsive to the varying needs, concerns, and specific contexts of those who have experienced or are at risk of GBV (see Box 1.2.).

Types of GBV and Settings Where GBV Occurs

"GBV is a global problem: it occurs in every country and society. It happens in public and private settings, including but not limited to digital and online spaces, educational settings and schools, the home, workplaces and in transit. Types of GBV include, but are not limited to: child, early, and forced marriage; female genital mutilation/cutting; so-called 'honor'-based violence and killings and other harmful practices; acid violence; dating violence; domestic violence; female infanticide; femicide or gender-related killing of women and girls; all forms of human trafficking; intimate partner violence; sexual harassment; stalking; all forms of sexual violence, including reproductive and sexual coercion, and rape, including marital rape, so called 'corrective' rape, and rape as a tactic of conflict. Other types of violence that are sometimes gender-based include but are not limited to: abandonment; neglect; bullying; child abuse; corporal punishment; and elder abuse" (USAID and U.S. Department of State 2016) (See Glossary for additional types of GBV and definitions).

Box 1.1. A Note on Terminology: LGBTQI+ and Diverse SOGIESC

USAID generally uses the term "LGBTQI+ people." The *Foundational Elements* use both "LGBTQI+ people" and "people of diverse SOGIESC." LGBTQI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, with the + acknowledging people of other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities not covered by LGBTQI alone. SOGIESC is an acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics. All people have SOGIESC. "People of diverse SOGIESC" is typically used to refer to non-heterosexual, non-cisgender, and/or non-binary people and is meant to be inclusive of LGBTQI+ people, as well as others.

Consult with local LGBTQI+ communities and organizations to understand what terminology is best for each context.

(USAID n.d., Edge Effect 2021)

What Are the Root Causes and Drivers of GBV?

GBV is rooted in gender inequality, power imbalances, and the structures and social norms that sustain such inequality. While they vary across cultures and societies, gender norms regarding masculinity are often associated with force, dominance, power, control, and sexual entitlement, while femininity-related norms are associated with submissiveness, powerlessness, and sexual purity before marriage.

In some contexts, violent behavior—which may include sexual coercion and rape—is often normalized to maintain compliance with these norms and can be used to "punish" or discipline transgression of these norms. Some norms sustain GBV practices that are seen as protective—such as child, early, and forced marriage and early unions and female genital mutilation/cutting—but are based in societies' subordination of women and girls and adherence to rigid gender roles. Often, norms stigmatize survivors and prevent them from reporting violence or seeking help.

Factors that contribute to GBV include social and economic inequality; instability caused by conflict or crisis; wider violence and trauma exposure, including in childhood; lack of educational or economic opportunity; food insecurity; poor relationship and communication skills; social exclusion; substance abuse; mental health problems; and legal, political, and service delivery systems that justify, excuse, or ignore GBV (UNHCR n.d.).

Understanding GBV Risk Using the Socio-Ecological Model

The socio-ecological model has been adopted in most GBV programming to illuminate how risk factors for GBV at each level of the ecosystem can intersect to affect risk (Jewkes 2020, Prevention Collaborative 2020). Interventions that effectively reduce GBV often address multiple risk factors and multiple levels of the socio-ecological model (Figure 1.1.). For example, programs to prevent child marriage may address girls' lack of agency and empowerment through skills training (individual level) and family and community workshops to transform social norms that drive child marriage (interpersonal and community levels). Another example is when referral systems are strengthened to improve response to school-related GBV (community level), and teachers and students are trained on safe, confidential mechanisms for reporting GBV (individual level).
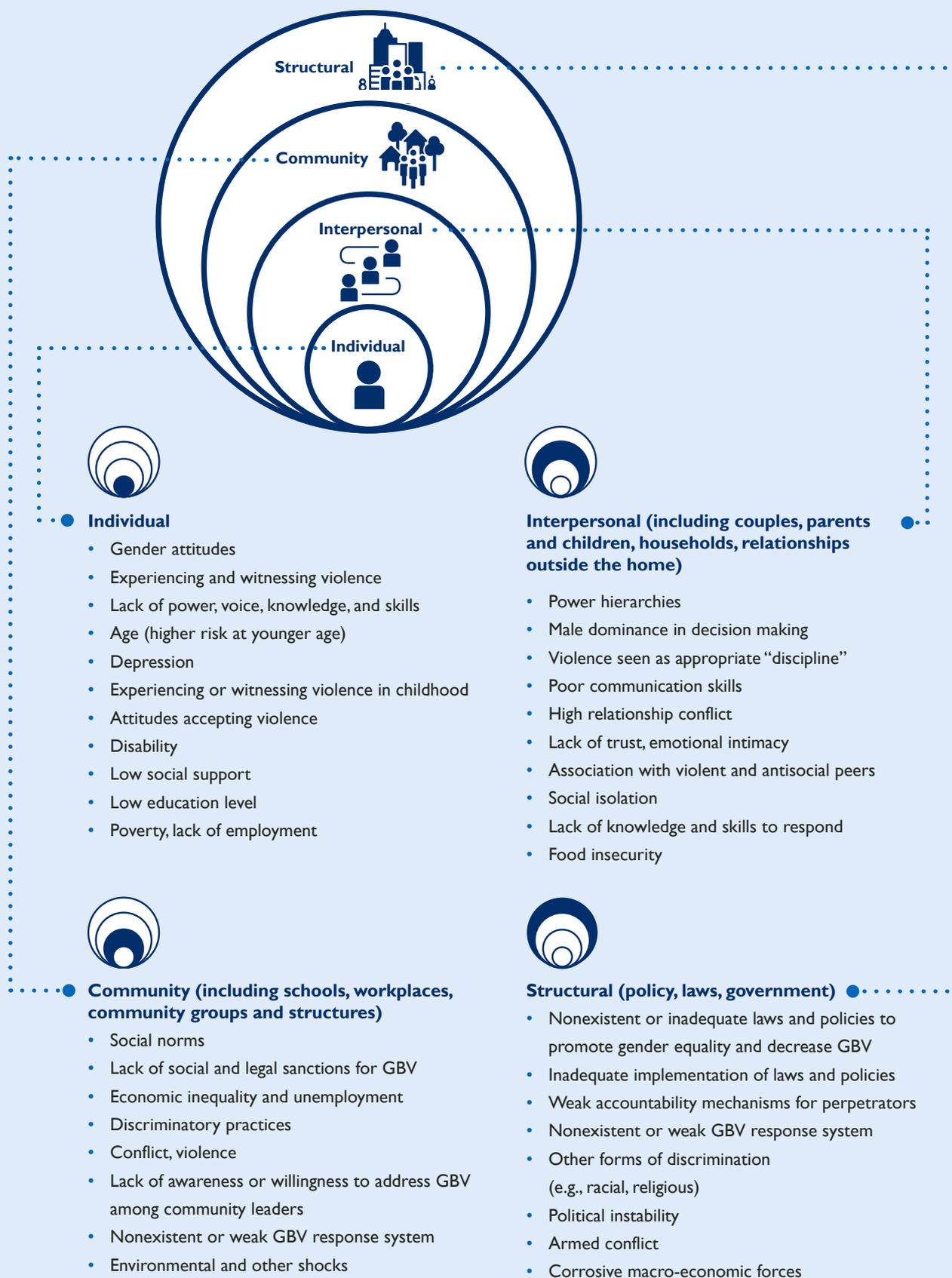
Importantly, *risk factors for GBV vary based on local context and the type of GBV*; therefore, conducting gender and GBV analyses (see Section 3.0. Process Elements: Values, Organizational Culture, and Leadership) is critical to understand the types of GBV and their associated risk factors in the geographical areas where programs will be implemented.

Box 1.2. GBV and Diversity

This guidance document often refers to "diverse groups" and "survivors in all their diversity." This serves as a reminder that GBV can take different forms and affects different groups of people in different ways. Because of this variation, GBV program designers may need to be prompted to make sure their activities are inclusive, reach all groups (for example, transgender women), and are accessible (such as to persons with disabilities). Using intersectional gender analysis to understand the layers of inequality that different individuals face is essential to crafting responsive and effective GBV interventions. Inclusive USAID GBV strategies and programs that meet the varied needs of all GBV survivors should:

- Include consultation with the diverse groups affected by GBV

- Analyze power disparities, how different groups typically experience GBV, and the barriers each group faces in accessing GBV services

- Integrate mechanisms to minimize or eliminate power disparities, discrimination, and barriers to maximize reach, equity, and inclusivity of USAID's programmatic response

Figure 1.1. Socio-ecological model of risk factors for GBV

Individual
- Gender attitudes
- Experiencing and witnessing violence
- Lack of power, voice, knowledge, and skills
- Age (higher risk at younger age)
- Depression
- Experiencing or witnessing violence in childhood
- Attitudes accepting violence
- Disability
- Low social support
- Low education level
- Poverty, lack of employment

Interpersonal (including couples, parents and children, households, relationships outside the home)
- Power hierarchies
- Male dominance in decision making
- Violence seen as appropriate "discipline"
- Poor communication skills
- High relationship conflict
- Lack of trust, emotional intimacy
- Association with violent and antisocial peers
- Social isolation
- Lack of knowledge and skills to respond
- Food insecurity

Community (including schools, workplaces, community groups and structures)
- Social norms
- Lack of social and legal sanctions for GBV
- Economic inequality and unemployment
- Discriminatory practices
- Conflict, violence
- Lack of awareness or willingness to address GBV among community leaders
- Nonexistent or weak GBV response system
- Environmental and other shocks

Structural (policy, laws, government)
- Nonexistent or inadequate laws and policies to promote gender equality and decrease GBV
- Inadequate implementation of laws and policies
- Weak accountability mechanisms for perpetrators
- Nonexistent or weak GBV response system
- Other forms of discrimination (e.g., racial, religious)
- Political instability
- Armed conflict
- Corrosive macro-economic forces

Sources: Prevention Collaborative 2020; Mesfin, Jarvis, and Messner 2019; USAID 2022

How Does GBV Fit into Development Programming?

The harmful impact of GBV on development programming is difficult to overstate. The World Bank has estimated that violence against women costs countries up to 3.7 percent of their gross domestic product, more than double most countries' expenditures on education (World Bank 2019). In the *USAID Toolkit on GBV for Economic Growth,* GBV is described as encompassing "pervasive human rights violations, a global public health epidemic, and a direct threat to human development and economic growth" (USAID 2021). Given these wide-reaching effects, GBV affects the ability of all sector-specific development programs to achieve intended results. Furthermore, because all programs exist within the broader fabric of gender, social, and economic inequality and power disparities, programs should consider how to mitigate any GBV that occurs as a backlash to efforts to shift power and promote gender equality. It is important to note that these risks can almost always be addressed with careful planning with local stakeholders. And where this is possible, GBV risks should not be seen as a reason to not implement GBV prevention or response programming.

All USAID programs addressing GBV can amplify positive outcomes for other sectors of development. The USAID Implementation Plan appended to the U.S. Strategy assigns a role in this effort for all staff, across sectors, asserting that "addressing gender-based violence is a shared Agency responsibility and success depends upon the commitment of all staff" (USAID and U.S. Department of State 2016).[1]

USAID staff in all sectors should help ensure that GBV concerns are addressed throughout the program cycle and that implementing partners have the resources, expertise, and support to identify and address GBV in their work. Figure 1.2. illustrates how GBV should be integrated into the Agency's program cycle (USAID 2021). As part of this process, USAID staff should encourage implementers to engage people who are representative of the groups the program is meant to reach. They should also urge implementers to partner with GBV specialists (see Box 1.3. for information on engaging GBV specialists).

### At a Glance: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and GBV Risk Mitigation

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) is a form of GBV. All development professionals have an ethical obligation to prevent SEA and a legal obligation to report it (see Section 4.0. Process Elements: Values, Organizational Culture, and Leadership).

In addition, all development programs—even those that do not include GBV activities—should consider how to mitigate the risks of other forms of GBV that may occur in relation to program participation.

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[1] Requirements of USAID staff and GBV-related goals for USAID programming may shift with revisions to the 2016 U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally. The *Foundational Elements* represent the best evidence to date of how to support implementation of GBV programming and are relevant to development programming across policy contexts.

Figure 1.2. Addressing GBV throughout the USAID program cycle

Ensure that USAID staff and implementing partners are aware of GBV-related strategies, policies, and requirements*
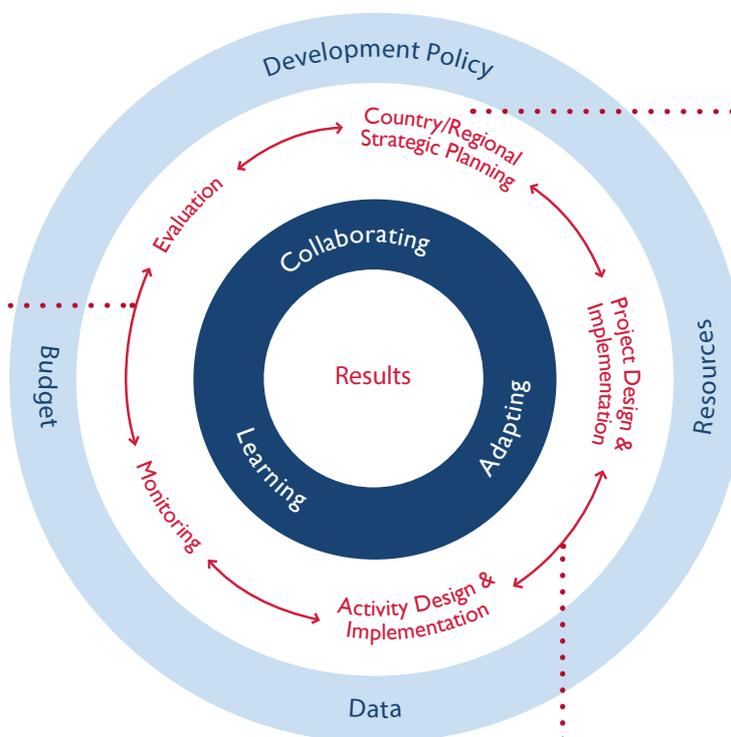
Project and activity design and implementation

- Incorporate GBV outcomes from the GBV analysis in results frameworks for project and activity design

- Integrate GBV requirements into solicitations‡ and proposal evaluation criteria

- Integrate GBV results into activity workplan

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)

- Identify qualitative and quantitative measures for GBV results in the MEL plan, including standard F and custom GBV indicators

- Use MEL results in participatory processes to adapt projects and activities

Country/regional strategic planning

- Conduct GBV analysis

- Incorporate GBV outcomes from the GBV analysis in results frameworks for country and regional strategies

- Include standard USG foreign assistance indicators ("F indicators") and custom GBV indicators in Mission performance management plans (PMPs)

- Allocate funding for GBV programming in operational plan and report on results in performance plan and reports (PPRs)

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* The USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy; The U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; The U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality; The U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally; Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act; The USAID Vision for Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children; The USAID LGBT Vision for Action: Promoting and Supporting the Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals; The USAID Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy; The United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls; USAID's Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy; ADS Chapter 205: Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle; ADS Chapter 201: Program Cycle Operational Policy

‡ Using questions for consideration from the *Foundational Elements*

Standalone vs. Integrated GBV Programming

Programs that address GBV can generally be categorized as standalone GBV programming or integrated GBV programming. Standalone GBV programming is specialized programming that has the main objective of addressing GBV. Standalone GBV programs may be delivered through any USAID sector. Examples include:

- Prevention programs that promote social norm change to address drivers of gender inequality and GBV

- Community mobilization programs

- Initiatives to engage men and boys about equitable relationships with their partners

- Safe spaces for women and girls

- Capacity strengthening for health providers to offer survivor-centered care

- Provision of legal aid and other justice services

- Capacity development among police to prevent and respond to GBV (IOM 2018)

Integrated GBV programming refers to sectoral programming that also includes any aspect of the GBV program elements—that is, prevention, risk mitigation, response, or cultivation of an enabling environment (see Sections 3.0.–3.5. for more on the program elements). Some sectoral programs include comprehensive GBV prevention and response programming. However, if their main objectives are to achieve sector-specific outcomes, they are considered integrated GBV programs. Examples include:

- An economic empowerment program adds a component to provide opportunities for gender-transformative reflection among women participants and their partners. The objective of such a program might be to foster gender-equitable relationships and engage men as allies of women's economic empowerment, thereby helping to improve economic outcomes and reduce GBV.

- A water security, sanitation, and hygiene (WSSH) program installs better lighting at water collection points as part of GBV risk mitigation and provides opportunities for community members to talk about gender roles and responsibilities. The objectives of such a program might be to raise awareness about sexual harassment and abuse, encourage men to collect water, and increase safety at water collection points, thereby increasing access to water and reducing GBV.

At a Glance: Standalone vs. Integrated GBV Programming

Both standalone and integrated GBV programming:

- Can be implemented in any USAID sector

- Can focus on any aspect of GBV programing (prevention, response, and enabling environment)

- Always include risk mitigation in their programming

Standalone and integrated GBV programming differ in their main objectives:

- **Standalone GBV programs:** The main objective is to address GBV—whether the focus is on GBV prevention, response, enabling environment, or any combination of these

- **Integrated GBV programs:** The main objective is to accomplish sector-specific outcomes, even if the programs also include GBV components

- An education program adds after-school clubs for youth to prevent school-related GBV, thereby helping girls and children of diverse SOGIESC to stay in school and reducing GBV (UNICEF 2018).

Standalone and integrated programming are equally important and mutually reinforcing approaches to addressing GBV. The program elements described in this section can apply equally to standalone and integrated GBV programming. Additional guidance on how to integrate GBV into sectors is provided in the sector-specific program elements (see Section 3.5. Sector-Specific Program Elements).

At a Glance: The Roles of Standalone and Integrated GBV Programming

"Standalone programming is crucial in supporting targeted activities requiring dedicated action and also fosters innovation. Integration ensures GBV is not relegated to the margins and regarded as 'someone else's' problem, as it allows for a holistic approach whereby every actor and sector takes their share of responsibility in prevention and risk mitigation of GBV."

Source: UNICEF 2018, 8

Box 1.3. Engaging a GBV Specialist in GBV Programming

Because standalone GBV programming tends to have a larger scope related to GBV and cuts across sectors, these projects should include GBV specialists among project leadership. Integrated GBV programming would also benefit from partnering with a GBV specialist, both for technical oversight and to provide technical expertise on program design and capacity building of staff who are not GBV specialists. Specific tasks where a GBV specialist would ideally be engaged include integrating GBV into strategic plans and activity design, assessing staff capacity and conducting GBV training and capacity building, mapping referral networks, establishing GBV reporting mechanisms, developing GBV risk monitoring and mitigation plans, and designing and implementing prevention and response strategies.

The criteria for a GBV specialist will vary by type of project but may include:

- Believes in gender equality and has experience integrating gender into development programming

- Understands and applies core principles of GBV programming (see Section 2.0. Core Principles)

- Demonstrates knowledge of GBV prevention, risk mitigation, and response theories and tools

- Has experience designing and implementing GBV programming and integrating GBV activities into development programs

- Demonstrates knowledge of preventing SEA and has experience implementing SEA prevention and response activities

- Applies critical thinking and problem solving to create innovative, context-specific GBV programming

- Effectively manages GBV programs and projects

Source: Global Protection Cluster 2014)

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The goal of the Collective Action to Reduce Gender-Based Violence (CARE-GBV) activity is to strengthen USAID's collective prevention and response, or "collective action" in gender-based violence (GBV) development programming across USAID. For more information about CARE-GBV, click here.

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