

## Programming to Prevent Violence Against Women: **PRACTICE BRIEF**

### Adaptive Programming: **Addressing Unintended Consequences**

Many violence prevention programs are designed based on a theory of change that sets out pathways to expected results drawing on the available evidence. While this is important, in reality, social change is not linear and programming on the ground is often messy and unpredictable and produces a range of outcomes - intended and unintended. However, the unintended consequences of interventions – whether positive or negative – are often overlooked. Yet we must understand them if we are to ensure programs do no harm and instead maximize their positive impacts on women, their families, and their communities.

This practice brief explains why it is critical to track and respond to the unintended consequences of violence prevention programming. It gives practical examples from the experiences of organizations and proposes approaches to support this process and promote organizational and program learning and adaptation.

#### KEY ISSUES

- What are ‘unintended consequences’ of programming and why is it important to track them?
- What have been some examples of unintended consequences of VAW prevention programming?
- What have been the various experiences of these issues in different organisations?
- What tools and approaches can be used to track unintended consequences and adapt VAW prevention program to changing realities?

#### **WHAT ARE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?**

Development interventions do not take place in a vacuum. They interact with existing socio-economic and political processes in many different ways. Interventions may introduce new resources, challenge or reinforce hierarchies of power, or create risks and opportunities for the individuals, organizations and communities involved.

The ensuing processes of change are neither linear nor predictable and, as a result, some development projects have failed to achieve their intended results, while others have had unintended positive and negative results.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this, most program evaluations and monitoring systems focus only on the intended outcomes of programs, as specified in the logical framework, theory of change or randomized control trial (RCT). They follow a culture of results-based management, emphasizing accountability for intended results and thus, unintended consequences are rarely identified.

Yet, as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s evaluation guidance (1991)<sup>2</sup> stresses, it is critical to document, respond to, and learn from these unintended impacts to ensure that programs do no harm and to maximize their positive impacts on women, their families and communities.

## EXAMPLES OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PROGRAMMING

### 1. RESISTANCE AND BACKLASH FROM MEN

Programs to empower women and prevent VAW also affect men. Prevention of VAW involves challenging masculine privilege and established relations of power between women, men and other genders. This is a sensitive process that often provokes resistance or backlash from men. Male participants sometimes claim they are being unfairly accused of violence, or retort that women are also violent and that men, too, face gender injustice.

In response, men may even start using more violence and controlling behavior over women, in an attempt to regain the power they perceive they have lost through the programme.<sup>iii</sup> While some resistance is expected in processes of social and behavioral change, in VAW prevention programming this must be closely monitored and addressed to ensure that violence does not escalate.

### RWANDA: MALE BACKLASH

Research on CARE's Village Savings and Loan (VSL) programming in Rwanda<sup>iv</sup> revealed that some men resist projects aimed at increasing the livelihood security of women. Several men struggled to cope with shifting power relations, protesting that they had less access to VSL groups than women. Some complained that the women no longer had time to cook and serve food for their husbands. Others claimed that their wives in VSL groups had become less respectful towards them. In a few cases, the research documented backlash in the form of increased violence against female members of VSL groups. In response, CARE began engaging the male partners of VSL members through a gender transformative couples' curriculum, which is showing promising results in terms of household livelihoods, gender relations and violence reduction.

### 2. SUBVERSION AND CO-OPTION

Participants in development programs are never passive recipients and may subvert or co-opt interventions for their own priorities. In VAW prevention programs, participants may take phrases used in program communications or trainings and reframe them in ways that harm women. In other cases, resources intended for women are co-opted by men in private.

### RWANDA: CO-OPTION OF RESOURCES

CARE initially found that loans given to women as part of VSL programming were used by their husbands, who also controlled the benefits. This was an additional reason for CARE to start actively involving men in program interventions.

### PRACTITIONER REFLECTION: CO-OPTION OF LANGUAGE OF "SEXUAL VIOLENCE"

“ In the last five years, in three different contexts – Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana, Malawi - I have held discussions in communities receiving VAW prevention programs, where some men have employed the term 'sexual violence' to describe situations where women refuse sexual intercourse to their husbands. In each case, the men had co-opted the new language of 'sexual violence,' introduced by VAW programs, to reinforce demands that their wives submit to sexual intercourse when their husbands wish. This clearly has the potential to be very harmful to women, especially when the programs also stress that sexual violence is illegal, harmful, punishable... ”

**Lyndsay McLean**, The Prevention Collaborative



### 3. SHIFTING, NOT REDUCING VIOLENCE

Sometimes, while monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data illustrates a reduction in a specific form of violence targeted by a program (e.g. street harassment), violence may actually have shifted into more private spaces or transformed into more insidious and less perceptible forms of abuse, such as coercive control. When violence shifts into new and unexpected forms, it can be difficult to measure and may, in fact, pose more harm for women.

#### BANGLADESH: INCREASE IN STIGMA AND ABUSE

CARE's social enterprise program, JITA, supports poor women in rural Bangladesh to sell local products door-to-door in their communities. Due to their involvement in JITA, some women received criticism from neighbors for breaking the practice of purja, which forbids women to work in public. Specifically, the evaluation noted an increase in stigma and verbal abuse against the women involved.<sup>v</sup>

### 4. AGGRAVATING TENSIONS, EXCLUSION AND MARGINALIZATION

While women from vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minority women, disabled women, and widows, may be difficult to reach with program activities, their exclusion can further exacerbate their marginalization. Organizations sometimes justify such exclusions by pointing to funding limitations or the need for

control groups in impact evaluations. In some cases, individuals from vulnerable groups are purposely excluded by other community members who try to monopolize program benefits. All these forms of exclusion frequently result in worsening the situation for vulnerable women.

### 5. INCREASING BURDEN OF LABOR ON WOMEN

Some violence prevention programs aim to empower women economically, to reduce their financial dependency on men. However, unless a program secures men's commitment to greater equity in the household, such programs often result in an increased burden on women.

Women begin to work more and generate more household income, yet they often also continue to do all the domestic and caring work. In some cases, men may even start contributing less to the household finances (e.g. for food or school fees) because they believe the women can now cover these household costs with their own incomes.

#### PRACTITIONER REFLECTION: INCREASING THE BURDEN ON WOMEN IN UGANDA

“ In 2017, I visited several VAW prevention programs in Kamuli District in Uganda. Two programs focused on the economic empowerment of women through training them in business development skills and providing credit. I listened to multiple testimonies from women about how their income had improved, and they could now afford school fees. Yet many of these women also spoke of the increased burden on their time and lamented how their husbands had reduced or withdrawn their monetary contribution to the household as a consequence. ”

Lyndsay McLean, The Prevention Collaborative

### 6. CREATING UNMET DEMAND FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

A common outcome of VAW prevention programs that succeed in shifting attitudes and norms around the acceptability of violence and treatment of women abused, is that more survivors speak out and seek help. This can be problematic, however, if the increased demand stretches response services beyond their capacity, meaning that survivors may not get the vital support they need.

For example, if a woman reports her husband's violence to the police but they have not yet been trained in to responding to domestic violence or no specialized police unit has been established to manage such cases and conduct referrals, the police may encourage her to return to her husband. Even if the case is eventually prosecuted, this may take months and the police are often unable to protect the survivor in the interim and there may be no option other than for her to return home. In such situations, women face an increased risk of revenge violence if their husbands discover they have attempted to seek help.

#### DRC: INCREASED DEMAND FOR PEP KITS

In Ituri Province of DRC, Tearfund works in remote villages to prevent and respond to VAW through training and mentoring of faith leaders and gender champions. Community Action Groups in each village support survivors of sexual violence, aiming to transport them to the nearest clinic within the mandated 72 hours to receive a PEP kit and emergency contraception. As a result of this initiative, more survivors of sexual violence have sought help. However, when this demand began to increase, only one clinic several hours from the program villages had PEP kits in stock and these were running out, due to the end of another project. Luckily, in this case, Tearfund was able to secure extra funding to procure additional PEP kits for several local clinics, but programs might not always have this option.





## 7. THE PACE OF CHANGE MAY BE TOO RAPID

Although processes of social change take time, some individuals may be ‘early adopters,’ ready to quickly embrace change. However, acting too rapidly can provoke tension and backlash from those in the community not yet ready to change, unintentionally sabotaging what needs to be an incremental process of change with a critical mass of people on board.

### **PRACTITIONER REFLECTION:** STEPS OF CHANGE

“ There are always going to be early adopters and if those adopters jump directly to action, it can be really dangerous. There won’t be support in the community to support the action. It will fail, and then everyone will be discouraged ”

**Lori Michau**, Raising Voices

## 8. IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS CAN HAVE POSITIVE EFFECTS

Several VAW prevention programs work with couples to improve communication and relationship dynamics, and to support non-violent conflict resolution. While the primary outcome measures for these programs are shifts in attitudes and behaviors around gender roles, decision-making, and violence, these programs can sometimes have additional positive impacts.

Improved relationship dynamics and open communication may positively impact the wellbeing of children and other family members. Couples may also begin cooperating better in other matters, such as income generation and household budgeting, resulting in improved livelihoods.

## UGANDA:

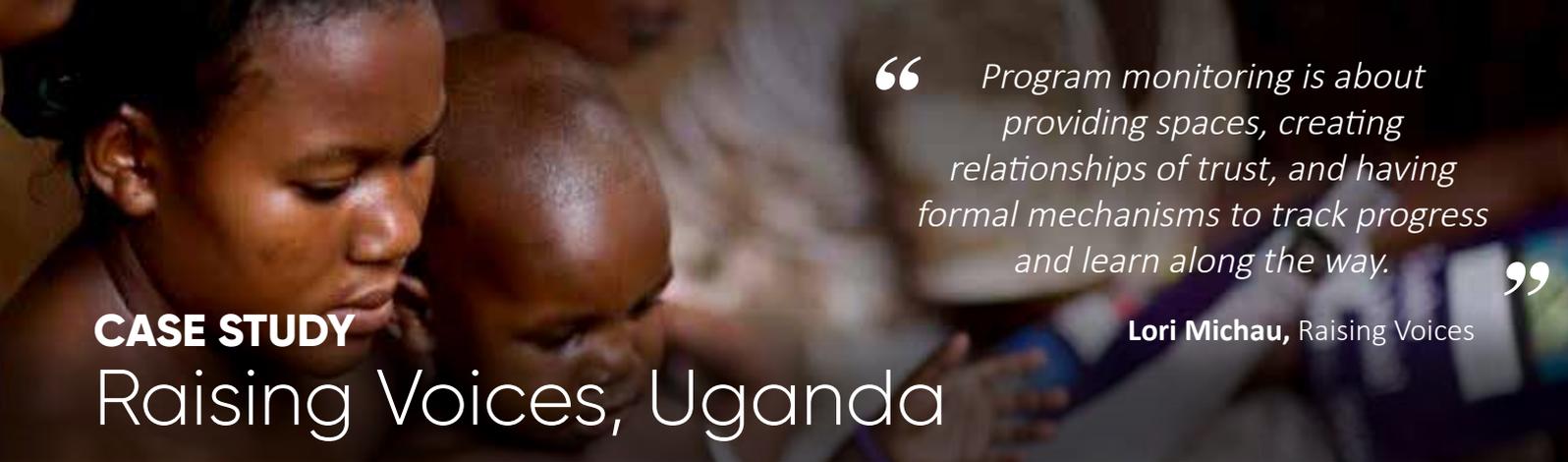
### **OVERLY-ENTHUSIASTIC VOLUNTEERS**

SASA! uses volunteers to engage communities to think critically about men’s power over women and act to prevent VAW. Early in the process, trainee volunteers are often enthusiastic to take action immediately, but this can have unintended negative consequences. For example, if they begin awareness-raising activities before local leaders are equipped to cope with more women seeking help, leaders may feel exposed and react negatively. To avoid this, staff ensure there are activities that volunteers can channel their energy into straight away, such as talking to their neighbors or engaging in discussions in support groups. They are also encouraged to first to build social connections, develop relationship skills, and foster critical thought within the community.

## RWANDA:

### **IMPROVED HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

CARE and partner organizations, the Rwanda Women’s Network and the Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre, have implemented a couples’ curriculum with individuals from VSL groups and their partners. The curriculum promotes healthy relationships to prevent intimate partner violence. As a result of their participation, many couples have improved their communication and started to involve each other in decisions, including economic decisions. They have been able to work together to combine the small program stipend with existing resources to improve their household income generation. This positive effect was not intended but has helped attract other couples to the program.



## CASE STUDY

# Raising Voices, Uganda

“ Program monitoring is about providing spaces, creating relationships of trust, and having formal mechanisms to track progress and learn along the way. ”

Lori Michau, Raising Voices

## HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFY, ASSESS AND REACT TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES?

Lori Michau is co-director of Raising Voices, a non-profit organization based in Kampala, Uganda. Raising Voices developed SASA!,<sup>vi</sup> a community mobilization approach to prevent violence against women and children and HIV. SASA! supports communities through a step-by-step process of social change by building a critical mass of individuals dedicated to ending violence. Volunteer Community

Activists (CAs) engage community members in activities that facilitate personal reflection and public dialogue about power imbalances, violence and HIV, and how they are interlinked. Here, Lori shares some insights into how Raising Voices ensures SASA! programming is responsive and adapts to changing realities in communities.

## MONITORING AND TRACKING TOOLS

Raising Voices has worked with external research organizations to provide rigorous evidence that violence can be reduced within programmatic time frames.<sup>vii</sup> It has also developed a range of M&E tools that can be used by non-specialists to track progress, including: a rapid assessment survey implemented at the end of each SASA! phase; two simple community activity reports (one for

staff and one for CAs) to monitor activities; and an outcome tracking tool to measure shifts in community members’ knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours during each phase. These simple tools help staff keep track of activities and measure the response of the community on a regular basis, so any challenges can be detected, and adjustments can be made to programming.

## FOSTERING A CULTURE OF OPENNESS, LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

There is a tight feedback loop between programming and monitoring so opportunities and challenges can be addressed in real time:

- Bi-monthly meetings for CAs to share their experiences, discuss challenges, solve problems, and build skills.
- Quarterly meetings for staff and CAs to examine trends in the data from the tracking tools to identify any activities that require strengthening or remedial action.
- Staff are encouraged to regularly and informally chat with CAs and community members to keep an eye on social dynamics as they unfold in the community, and to relay the information to their supervisors.

- Clear expectations of behaviour and stringent, transparent mechanisms of complaint and conflict resolution to encourage accountability from community members, CAs and staff.

“ Monitoring is more than a science, it is an art – the art of being in touch with communities...We encourage staff to linger, to stop by the kiosk, to say hello, to chat with people ”

Lori Michau, Raising Voices

These people-centered mechanisms have enabled organizations using SASA! to closely monitor the evolution of programming and detect some unintended consequences, which otherwise would have

been missed. Staff and CAs work together to respond to challenges and adapt the interventions to minimize harm and maximize the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.

## EXAMPLE OF ADAPTIVE PROGRAMMING IN ACTION: SASA!

The third phase of SASA! emphasizes reaching out to women experiencing violence. During implementation in Kampala, some community members saw this as meddling and gossip began that male CAs were using their role to have affairs with women.

CAs raised this during a bi-monthly meeting so the team decided to produce an additional communications pamphlet on the importance of providing support to women experiencing violence and how to do this well. They also encouraged male CAs to primarily reach out to men and to alert female CAs if a woman needed support, or to take a female CA along with them on home visits. All of these actions helped to minimize community concerns.

“ In an effort to reach out to women, we were indirectly creating more problems – male partners were suspicious, women experiencing violence were reluctant to engage with CAs or go to SASA! activities and male CAs were --undeservedly! -- getting a bad reputation ”

Lori Michau, Raising Voices



## CASE STUDY

# Puntos de Encuentro, Nicaragua

“ We’re committed to being open and transparent with donors about the need to think outside ‘log-frames’ and to think consciously and explicitly about social change, and how change is multi-dimensional and depends on social movements, not just technocratic shifts. ”

Amy Bank

## HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFY, ASSESS AND REACT TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES?

Amy Bank is a co-founder of Puntos de Encuentro (Meeting Points), a feminist non-profit organization based in Nicaragua. Puntos combines research, communication, training and mobilization to foster social change across Central America. Using an intersectional power analysis, Puntos promotes collective action for the empowerment of women, young people and other marginalized members of society. Rather than directly trying to change individual behaviors, Puntos aims to change, “the social context in which individuals act and in which discussion about different aspects of daily life [public and private] occurs.”<sup>viii</sup>

Puntos is perhaps most famous for its award-winning youth “social soap” TV drama, *Sexto Sentido* (Sixth Sense), exploring ‘taboo’ aspects of violence, gender inequality, sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, HIV and more in the lives of its characters. *Sexto Sentido* has been the launching pad for broad-based organizing efforts that have engaged hundreds of local and national organizations and services in 8 countries. Here, Amy shares how Puntos seeks to recognize and work with complexity in its programming approaches.

## RECOGNIZING COMPLEXITY

Puntos takes a flexible approach to programming and evaluation, drawing on the field of complexity science and systems thinking. Recognizing that change is complex, unpredictable and messy, Puntos adapts its communication and training strategies on an ongoing basis to respond to the needs of its partners as well as changing circumstances on the ground.

Puntos has worked hard to develop M&E systems to measure the kinds of tangible results donors want. This is a challenge for an organization that works at a national and regional level with dozens of organizations at a time and produces and disseminates mass media on multiple social issues. Puntos’ approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods with monitoring info from stakeholders and analysis from Puntos’ staff, to balance the organization’s own needs and those of donors. <sup>x</sup> This approach aims

to understand the whole picture — including perspectives from various sources, methods and informants — so that dynamics and results that may otherwise be hidden in formal evaluation processes are made visible.

“ Because we fundamentally believe that all personal and political a change is non-linear, incremental, and often even contradictory, it’s okay if things don’t go exactly as planned because our purpose is to open up dialogue and facilitate critical thinking, not dictate how people should think. We know deep change takes time and will go through many twists and turns. ”  
That’s all part of our theory of change.

Amy Bank

## EXAMPLE OF ADAPTIVE PROGRAMMING IN ACTION: SEXTO SENTIDO

The Nicaraguan government places restrictions on NGOs entering schools. However, *Sexto Sentido* and *Contracorriente* (Puntos’ second series) were so popular that the actors became celebrities. School leaders, unwilling to be seen as blocking them from visiting, allowed them entry to discuss the show.

Thus, Puntos was able to open a space for discussions of taboo subjects in public.

From the start, one of *Sexto Sentido*’s main characters was gay, to encourage people to critically reflect on their opinions about homosexuality. Through regular engagement with its audiences, Puntos realised that what they assumed were expressions of support for the gay character often contained a sense of pity. Puntos decided to deal with that head on in the storyline and also brought in new characters, including a lesbian and a transgender character. The result was more nuanced conversation that drew viewers’ perspectives away from pity and towards respect and even admiration.

## ASSESSING AND RESPONDING TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

### CONDUCTING PARTICIPATORY SITUATION ANALYSIS

Although VAW often has similar causes and consequences across contexts, the particular dynamics of violence – and the attitudes and norms that underpin it – may vary. Beginning with a situation analysis will clarify how program interventions are likely to impact on individuals, relationships, institutions, and power dynamics in a specific context. This can help practitioners predict and prepare for unintended consequences, and identify how to adapt ongoing interventions accordingly.

Women, their families, and community members are often in the best position to assess the potential positive and negative impacts of interventions. Therefore, a participatory situation analysis with community members is recommended. A situation analysis for a VAW prevention program may aim to answer key questions such as:

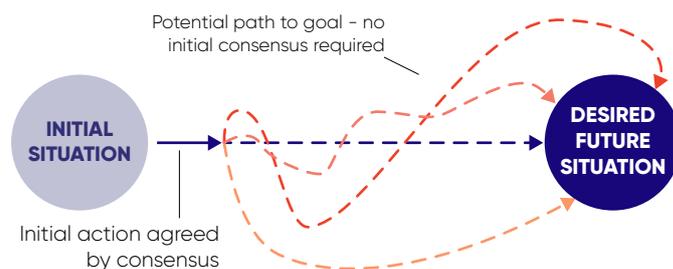
- What are the prevalence levels, causes, risk factors, and impacts of different forms of VAW in this context?
- Who are the most common perpetrators and victims?
- What are the predominant harmful attitudes, norms, and practices around gender roles, male authority, survivors' help-seeking, and the acceptability of VAW?
- Are there positive attitudes, norms or practices which support gender equality and non-violence?
- Are there individuals, groups and organizations that could be allies for violence prevention work?
- How are the proposed interventions likely to affect gender relations, roles and power dynamics in the household, schools, or communities targeted?
- What might be the sources and forms of resistance and backlash and how can these be addressed?
- What do women see as the main risks and benefits to them of the proposed intervention?

### DESIGNING FOR ADAPTATION

Ideally, VAW prevention programs are designed for adaptation from the start. Implementing organizations should expect to revise interventions in response to changing circumstances on the ground. However, most current programs adhere to traditional program logic models that set out a blueprint from which staff often feel they cannot deviate. As a result, practitioners have begun to develop other tools and approaches, which build in opportunities to review and adapt programs.

In a try-test-adapt model, termed “Feeling the Way to the Goal” (see diagram below)<sup>vi</sup>, program staff assess the initial situation, determine the desired future situation and then design an initial action that they feel is most likely to make progress towards the goal. They then review the results of the initial action to determine which path to take next.

‘Feeling the way to the goal’ model.



**Figure 1:** Illustration of the ‘Feeling the Way to the Goal’ model. Source: Bakewell and Garbett (2005).

### TRAINING, TRANSFORMING AND MENTORING STAFF AND AGENTS

The need for adequate training and mentoring of program staff and community volunteers is sometimes overlooked. People cannot be expected to foster change in others unless they have been through a thorough process of training and transformation themselves. Experience suggests that this requires a substantive initial training of several weeks, using interactive and iterative

methods to promote self-reflection, shifts in attitudes, and skills-building. Additionally, ongoing training and mentoring is required for staff and volunteers to monitor their progress, identify and address challenges, and detect unintended consequences.

### CREATING A LEARNING CULTURE

Creating an organizational culture that encourages discussion of what works and what does not is crucial<sup>xiii</sup>. Teams need to carve out time and space for reflection on problems, failures, and challenges as an opportunity to improve practice. Creating a learning culture involves figuring out what happened, and why, within both formal and informal processes.<sup>xiii</sup>

Some ways to do this include:

- Ensuring evaluation designs always have learning as a key objective, look at what went wrong and right, intended and unintended consequences.

- Ensuring regular meetings at local/field and program or headquarters level to analyze monitoring data, reflect on challenges, etc.
- Creating staff rewards and incentive systems for reflection, identifying and addressing challenges.
- Senior staff modelling this culture by admitting mistakes, encouraging and praising openness.
- Engaging in open dialogue with donors about the realities of programming and importance of learning.



## MONITORING TOOLS AND PROCESSES

Monitoring tools and processes need to be systematically designed to detect unintended consequences. Field staff, community gatekeepers, and even participants themselves can use simple forms to track changes on a regular basis. These can be designed with a mix of closed and open questions.

Examples include:

- Periodic rapid assessment surveys with different categories of beneficiaries or others to ask questions about impacts including shifts in their own knowledge, attitudes, practices and of others around them.
- Self-assessment / tracking tools such as forms and diaries for trained community agents to complete e.g. after an activity or reported VAW case.
- Activity report form for an observer to monitor activities – type of activity, participants, quality of activity, quality of facilitation, participant responses.
- Anonymous feedback mechanism for community members to raise concerns about the program.

## INVOLVING A RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As unintended consequences can affect people directly and indirectly involved in the program as well as others not targeted by the program, it is important to involve a variety of stakeholders during implementation and M&E.

Various approaches can be used to encourage this:

- Periodic interviews with different individuals and groups as part of the research and M&E process
- Consultation/feedback workshops with different groups engaged.
- Local program advisory or monitoring committee
- Informal conversations
- Regular triangulation of data from different sources to identify challenges and further discussion to develop strategies to address them as they arise.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief was written by Dr. Lyndsay McLean, University of Sussex, and Camilla Devereux, based on discussions with organizations that strive for continuous learning, supplemented with our own experiences and a literature review on programming practice. We thank Puntos de Encuentro and Raising Voices for openly sharing their experiences and documentation.

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## THE PREVENTION COLLABORATIVE

The Prevention Collaborative works to strengthen the ability of key actors in the Global South to deliver cutting edge violence prevention interventions informed by research-based evidence, practice-based learning and feminist principles. For more information go to [www.prevention-collaborative.org](http://www.prevention-collaborative.org)

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