



ENDING **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**
AND ACHIEVING THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



ADAPTING THE INDASHYIKIRWA INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME: LESSONS LEARNED IN IRAQ AND LEBANON





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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Acronyms	4
Purpose of this Report	5
An Overview of Indashyikirwa	7
Methodology and Conceptual Framework	10
Background on Project Adaptation	12
Adaptations to the Project Model	15
Modifications to the couples curriculum design	16
Modifications to the community activism design	18
Modifications to the women's safe space design	18
Modifications to the opinion leaders curriculum design	19
Adaptations to Project Implementation	20
Modifications to couples curriculum implementation in Lebanon	21
Modifications to couples curriculum implementation in Iraq	23
Modifications to opinion leaders curriculum implementation in Lebanon	24
Modifications to opinion leaders curriculum implementation in Iraq	25
Adaptations Based on Context and Population	26
Contextual and participant adaptations in Lebanon	27
Contextual and participant adaptations in Iraq	29
Evaluation Findings	30
Lebanon methodology	31
Lebanon key findings	31
Iraq methodology	33
Iraq key findings	33
Lessons Learned	36
Conclusion	41

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Erin Stern and Anik Gevers.

The pilots in Iraq and Lebanon and the accompanying evaluations were funded through the UNDP “Ending Gender-Based Violence and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals” programme, supported by the Republic of Korea. The authors of this report wish to acknowledge the project coordinators from both pilots: Gulistan Ibadat in Iraq and Sawsan Nourallah in Lebanon. They led the documentation of the adaptation in both pilots, participated in the reflection interviews to complement this report, and provided feedback on and verified its contents.

Acronyms

DFID Department for International Development

GBV Gender-based violence

IPV Intimate partner violence

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

VSLA Village savings and loan associations

WAHO Wand Al-Khair Human Organisation

WEP Women’s economic participation project



Purpose of this Report

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) global project "Ending Gender-Based Violence and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals" seeks innovative ways to address gender-based violence (GBV), including through integrating GBV programming within large-scale sectoral development programmes and applying participatory 'planning and paying' approaches. Seven pilots took part in this project, involving UNDP country offices in

Bhutan, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Peru, the Republic of Moldova and Uganda.

Pilots in Iraq and Lebanon choose and adapted an evidence-based model called "Indashyikirwa" (Agents of Change). This report compares "Indashyikirwa" adaptation experiences, processes and outcomes in these two settings. More broadly, it offers valuable insights and lessons learned in adapting evidence-based GBV prevention programmes.



An Overview of Indashyikirwa

“Indashyikirwa” was originally implemented in rural Rwanda. It was a collaboration between CARE Rwanda, the Rwanda Men’s Resource Center and the Rwanda Women’s Network, funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) Rwanda. “Indashyikirwa” is an intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention programme that aims to transform harmful social norms and practices underlying IPV through four major components:

- A 21-session participatory curriculum for male-female couples who were married or living together for at least six months, drawn from CARE Rwanda’s microfinance village savings and loan associations (VSLAs)
- Community-based activism adapted from the SASA! model established by Raising Voices,¹ led by a subset of individuals who completed the couples curriculum and received additional training
- Direct support to survivors of IPV through establishing several women’s safe spaces
- A six-session training and ongoing engagement of opinion leaders in the couples’ communities to support an enabling environment for IPV prevention

A randomized control trial of the curriculum for couples,² conducted as part of the DFID-United Kingdom funded “What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Programme,” demonstrated a significant reduction in IPV when comparing couples who participated with a control group of couples where female partners only took

part in VSLAs. Women in “Indashyikirwa” saw a 55 percent reduction in the odds of reporting physical and/or sexual IPV.³ The chances of men perpetrating physical and/or sexual IPV dropped by 47 percent.⁴ Additional significant impacts included:

- Reduced depressive symptoms among women and men
- Improvements in self-rated health among women and men
- Increased food security among women and men
- Improved relationship quality reported by women and men
- Significant reduction in the endorsement and frequency of corporal punishment and children witnessing violence among men and women

A separate randomized control trial of community activities (activism, women’s safe spaces and opinion leaders training and engagement) found no significant difference in the prevalence of IPV between control and intervention communities, whether reported by women or men.⁵ A ‘fidelity’ brief prepared on the “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum notes that: “There is no current evidence that all four components are needed to achieve the benefits demonstrated through the couples curriculum, which was implemented first and evaluated separately. However, certain elements of the entire model support the integrity of the intervention and it is valuable to consider these for adaptation of this approach.”⁶

This report details how the two pilot projects in Iraq and Lebanon adapted the “Indashyikirwa”

1 See: <https://raisingvoices.org/women/the-sasa-approach/>.

2 A research methodology to systematically and rigorously measure and evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention, procedure, treatment, device or medicine.

3 What Works to Prevent VAWG (2019). *Impact of Indashyikirwa: An Innovative Programme to Reduce Violence in Rural Rwanda*. <https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Impact-BRIEF-AUG-2019.pdf>.

4 Dunkle, K., Stern, E., Chatterji, S., and Heise, L. (2020). Effective Prevention Of Intimate Partner Violence in Rwanda Through A Couples Training Programme: Results of the Indashyikirwa community randomized control trial. *BMJ Global Health* 5: e002439.

5 Chatterji, S., Stern, E., Dunkle, K., and Heise, L. (2020). Community Activism as a Strategy to Reduce Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Rural Rwanda: Results of a community randomised trial. *Journal of Global Health* 10(1): 010406.

6 The Prevention Collaborative (2020). *Fidelity Brief for Adapting Indashyikirwa Couples Curriculum*.

model. They sought to improve its appropriateness for their different contexts and participants while maintaining fidelity to the elements that made the original programme effective.⁷ Assessing this process is especially relevant to organizations, funders and/or researchers interested in or currently adapting the “Indashyikirwa” model.

“Indashyikirwa” is currently being adapted in a variety of settings, including in Syria with UNFPA, in the Democratic Republic of Congo with Pigs for Peace and Rabbits for Resilience, and in Kenya with the Center for Rights Education and Awareness.

⁷ Ibid.



Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This report draws on documentation of adaptation by both project teams, project endline reports and qualitative reflection interviews conducted with project coordinators. The report follows the three elements of the Prevention Triad model, developed by the Prevention Collaborative.⁸ This triad promotes a more holistic approach to adaptation by emphasizing three interlinked pillars:

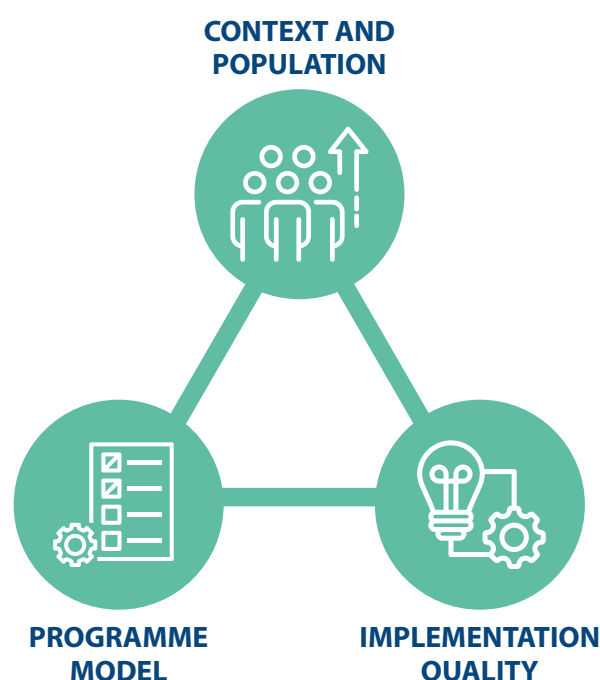
1. *The programme model*, comprising curriculum objectives and a theory of change; pedagogy, exercises and subjects covered; and accessibility, including whether a curriculum is understood and considered relevant and valuable
2. *Implementation quality*, covering the quality of facilitators recruited and their training, supervision and ongoing support; the delivery modality, including if online, in groups or one-on-one; and the level of participant attendance or take-home activity completion, which is influenced by factors such as the skills of facilitators, the creation of a safe space and rapport among group members
3. *Fit for the particular context and population*, encompassing the demographics of targeted participants, such as age, gender and socioeconomic status; the availability or motivation of participants to engage with a curriculum; social norms underlying GBV; and the presence of GBV services, laws and policies

These three pillars influence each other and should all be given equal emphasis when planning, modifying and documenting reasons for adaptation. Assessments of whether a programme ‘works’ often focus on the *model* only, although all three pillars

have a critical impact on maintaining fidelity to the programme and its outcomes. In this report, examples under each pillar emphasize curriculum-based approaches, as the adaptations in Iraq and Lebanon primarily consisted of these.

The report draws on the fidelity brief of the “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum to assess how well both adaptations tracked the original programme. UNDP used the brief in Iraq and Lebanon to guide documentation of their respective adaptations. The report discusses how both countries adapted the programme model and implementation based on context and different participants. It summarizes key final evaluation findings from both pilots and how the adaptations may have influenced these. It concludes with lessons learned on adapting the “Indashyikirwa” programme as well as more general adaptation of evidence-based violence prevention programmes.

Figure 1. The Prevention Triad developed by the Prevention Collaborative



⁸ Prevention Collaborative. (2022). *Introducing the Prevention Triad: A tool for understanding what works to prevent violence against women and girls*. Explainer brief.



Background on Project Adaptation

In Lebanon, UNDP renamed “Indashyikirwa,” calling it “M3an Akwa” (“Stronger Together”). The project took place from July 2019 to June 2022 in partnership with the civil society organization ABAAD and the international non-governmental organization ACTED. It used UNDP’s women’s economic participation (WEP) livelihoods project in Southern Lebanon as a platform to recruit both Syrian refugees and Lebanese participants.

In Iraq, UNDP titled its adapted programme “Khali Neghair” (“Let’s Change”). Implementation took place from October 2020 to September 2021 in partnership with Oxfam and the Wand Al-Khair Human Organisation (WAHO) in the Khanaqin and Muqdadiyah districts in the Diyala governorate. Both intervention areas have reportedly high levels of GBV.

Teams in both countries comprised UNDP staff, programming staff from partnering civil society organizations and the second author of this report as an international technical adviser. In Lebanon, a psychologist and GBV expert led the adaptation work in partnership with UNDP, ABAAD and ACTED. In Iraq, the team built on adapted materials from Lebanon and included staff from Oxfam and WAHO in the project design. Involving local partners and facilitators who went on to implement the intervention helped to improve fit for context, stakeholder buy-in and understanding of core components of the intervention. This approach aligns with the practice recommended in the “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum fidelity brief of leading the adaptation process in partnership with local organizations working on IPV prevention and response.

A UNDP staff member from Lebanon highlighted: “The adaptation process was very participatory. We did not do this alone. It was based on the needs and perceptions from the community. This was

based on focus group discussions with community members from both Syrian and host communities before starting the adaptation process. It was done with ABAAD which is a women’s rights organization that has a lot of expertise in and knowledge of the context. We also took into consideration fidelity criteria during the adaptation process.”

Teams in both countries consulted with technical advisers who worked on the original “Indashyikirwa” trial, including the first author of this report. This helped to guide teams in retaining core elements of what makes the model work.

The “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum fidelity brief identifies the value of piloting the curriculum. It encourages organizations to pre-test the curriculum after adaptation to a new context or population, and to make adjustments based on testing results. Pre-testing also allows facilitators the opportunity to practice facilitating the sessions and to receive constructive feedback. The “Stronger Together” project in Lebanon included a 10-month inception phase where the team reviewed and adapted the couples and opinion leaders curricula, hosted validation sessions with Lebanese and Syrian community members, and offered training and capacity-strengthening for facilitators. Curricula sessions were tested as part of training facilitators. This was not a pre-test with participants purposefully recruited as similar to target participants for actual implementation, however, as was done in Rwanda. There, a subset of couples, opinion leaders and women’s safe space facilitators each participated in separate curricula pre-tests. UNDP decided to test with facilitators only based on limited resources, time and the facilitators’ strong knowledge of the context and previous experience managing workshops related to GBV.

Iraq’s “Let’s Change” project included a three-month inception period involving obtaining approval

from the governor and other authorities in the two districts and making modifications to the couples and opinion leaders curricula and implementation design. The curricula were not pre-tested but the

facilitators conducted a pilot within their families before implementation. UNDP in Iraq used the curricula developed in Lebanon as a foundation, which facilitated a shorter inception period.



Adaptations to the Project Model

The projects adopted the four components of the “Indashyikirwa” programme in the following ways.

Modifications to the couples curriculum design

UNDP Lebanon translated the couples curriculum into Arabic, using the English version of the curriculum (which in Rwanda was implemented in Kinyarwanda). Some language had to be carefully translated, including the fundamental concepts of positive and negative types of power, which were initially confusing to participants. The “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum fidelity brief notes how the power framework is fundamental to the programme and stresses the importance of adaptation processes considering the effective translation of this concept into another language if needed.

Case studies, scenarios, names, laws and policies were carefully adjusted to reflect the Lebanese context and be more relevant to Syrian refugee women and men. For example, “Session 9: Common Triggers of GBV in Couples” was adapted to consider how forced displacement-induced changes in gender roles among Syrian couples and the lack of income-generating opportunities became common triggers of GBV among displaced Syrian women and men. “Session 16: Balancing Economic Power” was revised to make connections to UNDP’s WEP project, given that the original session linked to microfinance VSLAs in Rwanda. The adapted curriculum included more emphasis on psychosocial support mechanisms to help participants manage context-specific triggers of GBV, including forced displacement and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions.

The number of sessions fell from 21 to 17 (Table 1). “Session 10: Pausing for Reflection” and “Session 18:

Reflecting on Our Journey So Far” were removed to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on their own journeys of change. The team justified this decision given potential challenges for participants to attend such a long curriculum. They tried to make more space for reflection throughout all remaining sessions. Session 10 is particularly important, however, for participants to note any awareness and attitude changes before moving on to sessions focused on teaching skills and behaviours.

“Session 13: Managing Triggers—Feelings” was merged with “Session 14: Managing Triggers—Thoughts” to reduce the overall length of the curriculum and required commitment of participants. Yet this is a limitation, as Session 13 encourages participants to become more aware of their feelings and how to reduce negative ones, and Session 14 progresses to encourage awareness of one’s thoughts and how to choose more helpful ones. Both sessions introduce new, complex concepts from the field of cognitive behavioural therapy, including the thinking triangle. As the couples curriculum fidelity brief notes: “The curriculum was designed as a sequential journey of change for both participants and facilitators, with each session building on the next. It is not recommended to cut any of the curriculum sessions since they all are connected and support the overall change process.”

There are some exceptions to this guidance, such as where content or sessions are irrelevant or inappropriate in a particular context. For instance, “Session 17: Reducing Excessive Use of Alcohol” was removed for not being a common problem for most Islamic families in Lebanon and for being a controversial topic in Southern Lebanon. By comparison, the original curriculum included it because alcohol abuse was identified as a key driver of IPV in Rwanda.

Table 1. Couples curriculum session changes

Session number and topic	Adaptation status
Session 1: Starting the Journey Together	Maintained
Session 2: It Is All About Power	Maintained
Session 3: Power in Our Lives	Maintained
Session 4: G is for Gender	Maintained
Session 5: Rights and Reality	Maintained
Session 6: GBV—The Basics	Maintained
Session 7: Understanding Power Over	Maintained
Session 8: Gender, Power and Sexuality	Maintained
Session 9: Common Triggers of GBV	Maintained
Session 10: Pausing for Reflection	Removed
Session 11: What Makes a Healthy Relationship	Maintained
Session 12: Building Foundations for a Healthy Relationship	Maintained
Session 13: Managing Triggers—Feelings	Combined into one session
Session 14: Managing Triggers—Thoughts	
Session 15: Managing Triggers—Constructive Communication	Maintained
Session 16: Balancing Economic Power	Maintained
Session 17: Reducing Excessive Use of Alcohol	Removed
Session 18: Reflecting on Our Journey So Far	Removed
Session 19: Our Community, Our Responsibility	Maintained
Session 20: Providing Empowering Responses	Maintained
Session 21: Committing to Change	Maintained

The length of each session was reduced from an average of 3 hours to 2.5 hours to better accommodate participants' schedules. Yet this provided less time for critical reflection and sharing, which is even more of a gap since the two dedicated reflection sessions were cut from the overall curriculum. A UNDP staff member described how cutting the number of and length of each session may have undermined fidelity to the model and diminished the overall impact: "If we did not reduce the number and length of sessions, maybe we would have had more participant engagement and

impact. Knowing about fidelity concepts... maybe this had a negative impact on effectiveness."

UNDP Iraq used the same version of the couples curriculum adapted by UNDP in Lebanon but changed the case studies, names, scenarios, laws and policies to be more appropriate for the Iraqi context. The version in Iraq also offered more examples of the prevention of violence against children and positive parenting, a modification highly appreciated by many couples for emphasizing the benefits of healthier relationships with their children as well as their spouses.

Modifications to the community activism design

The fidelity brief of the “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum notes that while there does not necessarily have to be a community activism component, it is important to have an explicit next step after the curriculum. This provides couples with skills to support other couples and diffuse what they have learned to their wider communities. It can help support accountability and sustain change among couples and foster more enabling community environments.

UNDP Lebanon did not adapt the community activism component as originally designed and implemented because it would have stretched beyond the timeframe and budget of “Stronger Together.” Yet in each municipality where the project implemented the couples and opinion leaders curricula, it also aimed to establish a Gender Equality Café to create a safe space where women, men and community leaders who participated in either curricula could meet to discuss challenges hindering women’s empowerment in their communities and identify solutions. The cafés were designed to facilitate connections between different programme participants and to support couples and opinion leaders to act as agents of change. Given significant delays to the opinion leaders curriculum, however, for reasons detailed below, and subsequently to establishing the cafés, by the endline evaluation, only one café was in place. This limited assessment of the influence of this element on programme fidelity and impact.

UNDP Iraq similarly did not adapt the community activism component designed for “Indashyikirwa.” It did develop some awareness-raising materials and shared these with different forums and organizations. Some opinion leaders trained by

the project raised awareness of what they had learned during community-based discussions and disseminated programme materials. In total, 80 awareness-raising sessions took place, reaching 920 people (331 women and 589 men) across two programme districts.

Modifications to the women’s safe space design

Women’s safe spaces were not included in either of the adapted versions of “Indashyikirwa” because they were beyond the scope and budget of both programmes. Further, both projects could offer referrals to existing services. In Rwanda, by contrast, women’s safe spaces became part of the original model due to limited quality services. Where services do exist, it becomes more important to ensure clear referrals and train facilitators to make referrals in line with ethical principles and available services.

UNDP Lebanon raised awareness of local case management services among all participants—including those of the main implementing partner, ABAAD—and established referral pathways to safe spaces and services. Facilitators provided participants of the couples curriculum with contact details for ABAAD’s sexual and gender-based violence case management services, including a men’s support centre, to report GBV as needed.

In Iraq, participants in the cash-for-protection activity, one of the platforms for recruiting couples to the curriculum, already had access to GBV referral mechanisms, including legal, medical and/or shelter assistance. Details about existing hotline numbers and available services and how to access them were provided to facilitators, who shared this information with participants of the couples and opinion leaders curricula.

Modifications to the opinion leaders curriculum design

In Lebanon, the project translated the adapted opinion leaders curriculum into Arabic and amended case studies, names and scenarios to reflect the context there. The original opinion leaders curriculum was 6 sessions; this was expanded to 11 sessions to meet identified gaps in supporting change processes among opinion leaders. Several sessions from the couples curriculum were added to the opinion leaders curriculum, including “Session 2: It Is All About Power,” “Session 4: G is for Gender,” “Session 5: Rights and Reality,” “Session 6: GBV—the Basics,” and “Session 21: Committing to Change.” Some content from the existing opinion leaders curriculum was modified to be simpler and more user-friendly, including through clarifying terminology and allowing more time for participatory dialogue and reflection to ensure comprehension of new concepts.

A UNDP staff member commended the strengthened version of the opinion leaders curriculum: “Most of the

facilitators felt that the opinion leaders curriculum is missing a lot of the key concepts from the couples curriculum, which we thought was very important to set the foundation. The original opinion leaders curriculum assumes they have some knowledge and understanding of gender equality, which is not the case for our opinion leaders.”

The modifications built on lessons learned through the evaluation of the original opinion leaders curriculum in Rwanda. It suggested that “the training with opinion leaders would have benefitted from incorporating more relationship skills sessions, drawing on the ‘Indashyikirwa’ couples curriculum. This would help opinion leaders to model more equitable, non-violent relationships, which could be especially powerful for encouraging attitude, social norm and behaviour changes.”⁹

UNDP in Iraq used the same opinion leaders curriculum adapted in Lebanon but amended case studies, names, scenarios, laws and policies to reflect the Iraqi context.

9 Stern, E., Heise, L., and Cislighi, B. (2020). Lessons Learned from Engaging Opinion Leaders to Prevent and Respond to IPV in Rwanda. *Development in Practice* 31(2): 185-197.

A decorative graphic featuring a large yellow circle positioned on a white curved line that separates a light gray upper section from a dark blue lower section.

Adaptations to Project Implementation

Modifications to couples curriculum implementation in Lebanon

UNDP Lebanon purposefully recruited a mix of Syrian refugees and Lebanese individuals to take part in the couples curriculum. All women participating in UNDP's WEP activities were offered the opportunity to participate. Only couples married for at least six months were eligible, differing from criteria in Rwanda allowing married or cohabiting couples (although the six-month criteria was the same to ensure couples have some relationship history to reflect on). The modification in Lebanon reflected the cultural taboo and prohibition by religious authorities against unmarried men and women living together, especially in the intervention villages in Southern Lebanon.

The project asked women involved in WEP activities to invite their husband or any male relative from their household to attend the curriculum sessions. This was a significant modification from the original model, which focused on recruiting couples through a livelihoods platform (the VSLAs). The change in Lebanon was due to evidence that domestic violence can be perpetrated by an intimate partner or other family member, and to avoid leaving behind unmarried, divorced or widowed women. It also anticipated the challenges in recruiting male participants by widening the potential pool of men to a female participant's brother, father or son.

This strategy did not fully alleviate the anticipated challenge of engaging men, however. While 251 women participated in the couples curriculum, only 85 men did, meaning that over 70 percent of women took part without any male member of the household. Some staff reflected on the limitation of relying on women to invite men to the curriculum as not all women asked their husband to attend. Even those who did were not always capable of telling

their husband or other male household members what the training was about. As one UNDP staff member related: "A lot of women were not able to convince their male relatives or husbands to participate in the programme. That is why the ratio of men's engagement in the sessions was much lower than women's participation in the sessions."

In some cases, men prevented female partners from participating in the sessions, including one example identified in endline research of a husband threatening to divorce his wife if she took part. In Rwanda, women were initially informed about the curriculum through the VSLA platforms, which predominantly target women. Recruiting couples through women first can be an important safety mechanism. But programme staff then had to follow up with men and women together to clarify the objectives and content of the training before asking couples to volunteer to enrol.

A UNDP staff member discussed whether the decision to involve women and any male relative undermined the impact of the programme despite the underlying reasons for doing so: "I am not sure—when reviewing the final evaluation results of this project—if results could have been better, if we considered having couples instead of having women and men who were relatives. We had to take into consideration that women participants of our economic participation programme are not necessarily married. This criterion would restrict the participation of a lot of women and we were worried we will not be inclusive and this could raise tensions."

Another identified challenge of including both married and unmarried women in the same group sessions entailed reports of stigma and discrimination against unmarried women. For instance, some women saw divorced and widowed women as making negative observations about men based on their personal experiences.

Another significant modification was to implement most sessions with men and women separately, although this varied depending on the group and facilitator. Although some activities took place separately during the original “Indashyikirwa” curriculum in Rwanda, male and female partners came together for at least some or all of every session. Some benefits of facilitating single-sex sessions were identified. Facilitators of “Stronger Together” shared that women who attended the workshops without their male partner or relative, especially widowed or divorced women, were freer in expressing their perceptions of gender inequality and GBV compared to women who attended with a male household member.

More tangible benefits emerged from sessions bringing men and women together, however. The ease of doing so surprised many staff members, especially for some of the more sensitive content. One UNDP staff member in Lebanon observed: “We had six groups where men and women were together. We had some groups where men and women were not together. Through my observations, most men and women were engaged, discussing together. Facilitators also confirmed it was very positive. We thought we would not have all sessions together for women and men, for example, sensitive sessions on sexuality, or triggers of GBV. However, once we started the sessions and saw their engagement together, we saw that bringing men and women together is an added value.”

There were cases where men were less actively engaged in groups that brought men and women together. The endline evaluation found that the high imbalance in the number of men and women in one of the mixed groups (82 percent women and 18 percent men) discouraged men from participating in the discussions. When asked, most women across multiple mixed groups saw themselves as dominating the discussions. A more

equitable balance between male and female participants could have helped foster more equal participation by men, who were already more reluctant to engage.

In most groups, participants were from and/or living in the same village. In many cases, they were neighbours or relatives, which made some participants (both male and female) uncomfortable in openly sharing their experiences or opinions. The “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum fidelity brief notes that while it may be difficult to involve men and women together in all sessions due to contextual differences and sensitivities, “it is fundamental to the process of change of “Indashyikirwa” to intensively work with male-female, co-habiting couples together...and that there should be some efforts to bring couples together regularly, in order to be a couples programme.” Modifications to the criteria for participants and the limited engagement of men cast doubt on whether “Stronger Together” can be defined as a couples programme.

Another significant adaptation was the decision to hire only female facilitators to implement the couples curriculum. In Rwanda, one male and one female facilitator oversaw each session. The change was based on ABAAD’s prior experience in implementing gender programmes with men, where it found that men are less likely to resist new ideas presented by women. Yet having male and female facilitators, as the pre-test in Rwanda demonstrated, helps model gender equality and responds to cases where men or women prefer to speak privately to or seek support from a facilitator of the same sex. In the endline evaluation of “Stronger Together,” men indicated general satisfaction with the quality of female facilitators, describing them as highly professional and accommodating. Some participants also stated that having male facilitators could have encouraged men to engage more in the discussions, particularly around sensitive topics.

Facilitators for “Stronger Together” were hired based on qualifications and previous expertise in facilitating gender-transformative and GBV prevention programmes. Training by a GBV expert took place over several days and included the chance to practice facilitating. Ongoing support to facilitators comprised refresher trainings and reflection sessions where supervisors could review facilitators’ reports and provide feedback and tailored support. This resonates with a key practice identified in the “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum fidelity brief of carefully selecting, training and supporting facilitators, who are fundamental to quality and effectiveness in any curriculum-based approach.

The “Stronger Together” curriculum took place weekly over 17 weeks at the same scheduled time and place, the same approach taken in Rwanda. In some cases, and where possible for facilitators, sessions were provided outside normal working hours in line with the preference of participants. This is a strong example of adaptive programming and aligns with the practice in the “Indashyikirwa” fidelity brief of carefully considering how to make the curriculum work for couples so they are more willing and able to engage with it.

Modifications to couples curriculum implementation in Iraq

UNDP also used a livelihoods platform to recruit couples in Iraq. At least one participant had to take part for at least two months in Oxfam’s sustainable livelihood and economic recovery project, which includes cash-for-work programmes, asset management and support, and vocational training. Many participants of such initiatives are men, despite a criterion that at least 20 percent are women. Male and female participants were informed about the

couples curriculum and invited to bring their spouse to learn more about it before volunteering to join it if interested. An additional criterion was for couples to be married for at least six months, for reasons similar to those related to social taboos in Lebanon. Only one couple per household could participate, which was important for equity as it is not uncommon in the intervention communities for multiple couples to live in the same household.

Most participants in the curriculum were couples, apart from one divorced woman who completed the sessions with her brother, and another woman who completed them with her adult son. A UNDP staff member pointed to the uniqueness of working with couples in Iraq and how this attracted people to the model: “The most important thing was to *work with couples*. That was something attractive as a model. Because what happens usually with programmes here, whether livelihoods or stabilization, sometimes you only focus on men, sometimes only women. We never implemented such a comprehensive programme focusing on couples, targeting community leaders. Family relationships were never discussed publicly, especially related to sexuality. This was completely new in the context of Iraq. So the team was interested.”

Many sessions took place with men and women separately, a departure from the original model, but this was identified as necessary to ensure a safe space and mitigate the potential challenges of engaging men. As one UNDP staff member noted: “Initially, men were not interested. It was a disgrace to discuss domestic matters in front of others. So we divided into two groups. One was only for men, and one was for women. In that group we were careful that confidentiality should be maintained. It should not be discussed outside. Everyone should be free to discuss. By the end they were so comfortable.” The division of the sessions by gender was welcomed when

discussing sensitive subjects relating mainly to sexual relationships. Yet men and women also frequently came together in sessions. This was seen as very new in this context but greatly welcomed by male and female participants, including because it provided a rare space for partners to listen to each other.

The “Indashyikirwa” fidelity brief stresses the importance of making sessions work for couples so they can regularly engage, including through considering factors like the timing and location of sessions and whether to give a stipend. The Iraq project provided transportation, food and a cash stipend of \$20 to each participant per session, higher than the \$2.50 given in Rwanda, but in line with contextual differences. Stipends in both places were an important incentive and initial motivation for many couples, although this in some cases changed over time. One UNDP staff member noted: “When we selected the couples, a few registered their names just to get some money. That was their main objective. The good thing was that we were able to find good trainers who increased their interest and after a few sessions, they forgot they were there to get money. They saw how their capacities would increase through getting this kind of knowledge. When we see husbands and wives talk and laugh, which is not common here, I feel so happy to see this.”

The project in Iraq hired experienced facilitators through a competitive panel, including two women and two men, and one supervisor covering the two intervention areas. Many facilitators had worked on Oxfam’s gender-transformative “Journeys of Transformation.” Two different trainings over eight days covered the curriculum adaptation and content in detail and provided guidance on GBV programming and engaging men and boys.

Modifications to opinion leaders curriculum implementation in Lebanon

Unlike in Rwanda, the opinion leaders training in Lebanon did not purposefully recruit any religious leaders. This modification stemmed from political affiliations in Southern Lebanon, which made engaging religious leaders a sensitive matter. While UNDP responded to a request to recruit municipal leaders from areas that scored low on gender audits, this approach meant that there was not always alignment with the location of activities for opinion leaders and participants of the couples curriculum. As the endline evaluation noted, this may have reduced the relevance and complementarity of the two interventions. The opinion leaders training and engagement was originally designed to foster enabling environments for communities in which couples were trained.

In total, the project trained 75 opinion leaders, including 47 women and 28 men. Forty-four were community leaders and 31 were municipal leaders. The curriculum took place over five working days over two weeks, making it longer than the curriculum in Rwanda, which unfolded over five half days consecutively. This change was understandable given the addition of several sessions. Male and female opinion leaders participated in sessions together as in Rwanda. Apart from the Gender Equality Cafés, there was no ongoing engagement of opinion leaders through quarterly meetings and planning commitments as happened in Rwanda, which likely limited further actions and accountability.

In response to this gap, in June 2022, “Stronger Together” provided further support to municipal leaders from five targeted municipalities. Two days of training on gender integration aimed to enhance their understanding of the impact of harmful social

norms on the lives of women, men and people of diverse gender identities. Participants also gained skills and tools for analysing and integrating gender perspectives across the municipalities' programme cycles. The trainings will be finalized in September 2022, after which monitoring and evaluation information will be available.

Modifications to opinion leaders curriculum implementation in Iraq

In Iraq, recruitment of opinion leaders drew on a WAHO assessment of community influencers. Diverse opinion leaders were purposefully recruited. They included religious leaders, *mukhtars* (village chiefs), municipal/government officers, service providers and women's rights representatives. The curriculum was offered to 30 opinion leaders (20 men and 10 women), including 15 from Muqdadiah and 15 from Khanaqin. As in Lebanon, male and female opinion leaders participated in the same group sessions.

The opinion leaders training was more condensed in Iraq, with the 11 sessions taking place over one week with two sessions per day. Although there were no quarterly meetings or refresher trainings with leaders after the initial training, as was done in Rwanda, UNDP and Oxfam staff encouraged leaders to engage in awareness-raising sessions for community members.

A UNDP staff member commented on the importance of working with opinion leaders, including religious leaders, to disseminate programme-related messages: "Community leaders are key influential people in Iraq. They attended all the sessions and were happy and they arranged different dialogues with different groups and communities, women and other religious people on how to reduce GBV, and how to engage women. These sessions were mainly successful because, especially for men, they go through those religious leaders for getting any kind of advice or opinions. These religious leaders were bringing those gender-related issues into their discussions."



Adaptations Based on Context and Population

An important component of adaptation entails how projects adjust to specific contexts and populations and become feasible and appropriate. As contexts are constantly in flux, this aspect appreciates both pre-planned and more reactive adaptations. The adaptations in both Iraq and Lebanon were implemented in rapidly evolving and extremely challenging contexts.

Contextual and participant adaptations in Lebanon

Over the last two years, in addition to the ongoing Syrian crisis and its impact locally and regionally, Lebanon has grappled with political paralysis, economic and financial meltdown, skyrocketing inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions, and the devastating consequences of Beirut's port explosion in August 2020. According to the World Bank, in 2021, Lebanon had one of the three worst economies in global history. Since October 2019, the Lebanese pound has been (unofficially) devalued by more than 90 percent of its official value, leading to year-on-year inflation of 120 percent between May 2020 and May 2021.

According to a UN Women report, rampant job loss, rapid devaluation of pensions and savings, a severe drop in the purchasing power of incomes, heightened anxiety regarding the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged uncertainty relating to job security, the volatile exchange rate and the uncertain fate of bank deposits have all contributed to generalized levels of stress that are key triggers of GBV.¹⁰

A UNDP staff member related how challenges to engaging men through the couples curriculum largely related to an evolving and difficult context:

"Once we started implementation in Lebanon, the context changed drastically in terms of the economic and social situation, which limited men's ability to participate in the sessions. Although we made a lot of decisions to encourage men's participation, like providing a per diem and transportation, we were not very successful."

In response to the economic crisis, "Stronger Together" pivoted to provide all curriculum participants with a stipend of \$5 and \$4 to cover transport costs, which had not been originally planned. This modification was intended to incentivize men, in particular, to attend. The challenging context also affected work with opinion leaders, as GBV prevention and response needs were not prioritized at the community level, compared to measures to counter the economic crisis and meet people's basic needs.

A UNDP staff member suggested that it is critical to give attention to such contextual dynamics when interpreting evaluations of the effectiveness of this adaptation: "According to the evaluation, we had not much decrease in women's access or control of economic resources or decision-making for women, which should be analysed in light of the deteriorating economic situation and most of the population losing all their income. The results should not be analysed only through fidelity of adapting and implementing 'Indashyikirwa' but also need to take into consideration everything in terms of contextual challenges."

One of the most significant adaptations of "Stronger Together" was to offer the couples curriculum online through nine different WhatsApp groups. This helped avoid implementation delays due to COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Even so, it still

¹⁰ Salti, N., and Mezher, N. 2020. *Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Assessing the Differential Impacts of Economic Crisis on Women in Lebanon*. UN Women. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/report-women-on-the-verge-of-an-economic-breakdown-in-lebanon>.

took five months to adopt a remote modality, including to consult with women and technology organizations about the best platform, develop ethical considerations and produce audio-visual tools for each session. An additional two-day training helped facilitators provide sessions remotely. All online sessions were delivered to single-sex groups to allow for openness by men and women and to ensure women's protection. Two groups of women piloted the first online sessions. Participants received Internet bundles to facilitate access and stipends equivalent to \$5 per session. Each online session lasted 1.5 hours.

While this shift was an impressive and responsive achievement, there were many challenges, including poor connectivity, a lack of privacy, long hours of electricity cuts and limited potential for dialogue among participants. In the endline evaluation, facilitators highlighted the effectiveness of the curriculum's interactive learning activities and how these can only be delivered in person. Moreover, reports on participants not completing take-home exercises were more common for online sessions. During COVID-19 lockdowns, many female participants were working from home but also had caregiving responsibilities, and in many cases, were supporting their children with online education. This meant they had limited time to participate in "Stronger Together" despite their willingness and commitment. Men were even less committed to attending the online sessions.

A UNDP staff member reflected on the challenges of maintaining the pedagogy of the couples curriculum through remote adaptation: "Most of the exercises are very participatory. They require group work together or reflection in the family, or physical exercises. This was difficult to adapt to remote modalities via WhatsApp groups. To maintain fidelity of core components and exercises, we substituted a

participatory modality with individual exercises for participants; simply writing a message or sharing a voice note and then reflecting together in plenary. According to facilitators, (focus group discussions) and monitoring sessions, this adaptation proved successful because women were participating to discuss and negotiate, however, I don't think the effectiveness of the programme and the outcomes were reached through remote sessions as much as through face-to-face sessions. The facilitators were able to ensure everyone was engaged face-to-face but this was not possible online."

Despite the limitations of the online modality, facilitators reported being impressed with many female participants who attended every session and demonstrated increasing understanding of curriculum topics. Many women expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the workshops, despite technical challenges. Online sessions also reportedly improved a sense of well-being and psychosocial support for participants amid the stresses of the pandemic and confinement. Interestingly, more Syrian than Lebanese women said that they would have preferred in-person workshops to encourage more active engagement in discussions and to allow participants to develop social relationships with other women. As soon as COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed, the remaining couples curriculum training sessions (with an additional 12 groups) returned to in-person meetings.

The training of municipal leaders and community leaders was significantly delayed because of the pandemic and subsequently by the economic crisis. This training did not take place online. The Gender Equality Cafés only started at the end of the project given the delays to the opinion leaders training, which limited congruence between the couples curriculum and enabling environment activities.

Contextual and participant adaptations in Iraq

In Iraq, “Let’s Change” took place in rural areas in the governorate of Diyala. This posed significant security and logistical challenges since the area has been heavily impacted by terrorist groups. To mitigate security challenges, the project obtained approval from and ensured ongoing coordination with local authorities. Yet approval was difficult to secure and delayed initial implementation.

The governorate has significant swathes of agricultural land along with some oil but agriculture was decimated by political unrest from 2014-2017 due to the changing regime and elections. The governorate suffers from poor infrastructure and limited water supplies. While agriculture used to be the largest source of employment in the area, that is no longer the case. Food production is inefficient, resulting in higher food costs for families. The pandemic exacerbated this already challenging context even as it fuelled a greater domestic and care burden that fell overwhelmingly on women.¹¹

The programme adapted to better meet women’s needs by offering childcare services during the couples curriculum sessions. This was identified as crucial to support women’s engagement and avoid a scenario where women have to leave sessions early. The first 11 sessions took place weekly before moving to twice a week as requested by participants. This was due to the security situation

and high transportation fees. It also allowed participants to complete the programme before the start of the school year. The programme aimed to be flexible to meet the needs of couples while still ensuring enough time between sessions for couples to complete the take-home activities. These efforts seemed to pay off as the majority of couples completed all sessions. In total, 34 couples finished the curriculum while only 6 couples did not. Couples who dropped out did so because they found the content difficult to understand (especially those who were illiterate), fell sick or gained new employment.

Additional contextual factors that delayed “Let’s Change” encompassed pandemic restrictions, local elections and religious activities. The endline evaluation highlighted how a significant challenge was that laws and institutional and judicial systems in Iraq do not encourage a power balance between men and women. Although Iraq has many policies and strategies aimed at gender equality, it lacks specific laws, institutional structures and the political will to promote gender equality and justice. This diminishes opportunities for survivors of IPV to obtain support and limits potential responses by community leaders or other activists. It has also meant a dearth of laws and policies to legitimize the content of both the couples and opinion leaders curricula, in contrast to what was possible in Rwanda and Lebanon. The endline evaluation suggested that enabling environment activities in Iraq require broader advocacy for women’s rights, including to pass an anti-domestic violence bill.

¹¹ Oxfam (2020). *Gender Analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iraq*.

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Evaluation Findings

Lebanon methodology

The multi-method evaluation of “Stronger Together” in Lebanon included baseline and endline qualitative interviews with 3 municipal officials (2 men and 1 woman), 5 opinion leaders (4 men and 1 woman) enrolled in the programme, 10 programme staff and managers, 1 focus group discussion with curricula facilitators, 10 focus group discussions with women who participated in the couples curriculum (5 with Lebanese and 5 with Syrian women) and 4 focus group discussions with men who participated in the curriculum (2 with Lebanese and 2 with Syrian men). As part of peer research, a subset of female “Stronger Together” participants trained in qualitative research conducted 30 interviews of other participants about their impressions and journeys of change through the project.

A quantitative endline survey of women targeted by the project compared key indicators to the baseline survey. Baseline and endline surveys with WEP project participants as a control group helped to compare economic outcomes between the two groups. Many women in the control group also participated in ABAAD’s psychosocial support services, however (57 percent of them according to the endline survey). Given this overlap, the control group did not offer a sound ‘no-treatment comparison.

The survey targeted all participants of “Stronger Together,” including women, men, municipal officials and opinion leaders. While couples curriculum participants totalled 251 women and 85 men, contact details of only 197 women and 62 men were provided because activities were still ongoing during the endline evaluation. Out of the 197 women, 167 participated in the survey, a 79.5 percent response rate. Out of 62 men, 57 participated, a 91.9 percent response rate. Both were decent response rates. All research activities were conducted online or on the telephone to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

While ongoing monitoring and evaluation took place, the endline evaluation identified a lack of monitoring and evaluation staff and capacity among all implementing partners due to inadequate resources. This undermined the ability to collect data for adaptive implementation. Moreover, greater coordination was needed between UNDP, ACTED and ABAAD on monitoring and evaluation. The endline evaluation observed that the project would have benefited from better systemization in terms of collecting and reporting monitoring and evaluation data across the three partners.

Lebanon key findings

The evaluation of “Stronger Together” was not designed to measure the prevalence of IPV as it was beyond the budget of the project to do so in safe and ethical ways. Further, the sample size was too small to meet the statistical power requirements to detect change. Many other domains of change theorized as influenced by the project were assessed. Some key findings follow.

Among women:

- “Stronger Together” sessions were supportive, safe spaces that helped women cope with unprecedented stress and feel free to express themselves, which contributed to their improved mental health and well-being. This was true even for those who participated online during lockdowns.
- Many women developed changes in their previous justifications of violence and gained a broader understanding of GBV.
- Many women appreciated the importance of the power framework for understanding positive

and negative types of power and its impact on their own and their family's lives. They reported improvements in the balance of power in their relationships.

- Many women described healthier communication and improved conflict resolution with their spouse; however, the worsening economic crisis gave rise to more relationship tension and disputes.
- Many women reported some changes in beliefs and attitudes towards the gendered division of domestic and care work. Yet most continued to be responsible for this work and shared difficulties in convincing men to be more involved. This finding is not surprising given the limited engagement of men, especially male intimate partners.
- The majority of women found the sessions relevant and interesting. Yet the content was seen as generally more relevant for younger, married couples with children, compared to older and unmarried women. Younger, married couples were seen as more likely to be open to learning skills to improve relationships, and had more opportunities to apply lessons, such as in sharing household decision-making and domestic and care responsibilities. This finding is not surprising given that the focus of the curriculum was on working with couples.
- Many women found greater acceptance of women's economic participation. Yet there were no significant differences between women participating in "Stronger Together" and WEP alone in terms of access to and control over economic assets and food sufficiency.
- Many women indicated an increased willingness to take action to support survivors of violence but were less willing to promote gender equality.

Among men:

- The majority of men considered "Stronger Together" workshops relevant, giving them a better understanding of different types of violence, power and healthy communication. Some men considered some discussions on gender roles and women's rights as being more relevant for women.
- Although some men reported changes in justifications of violence, they were less likely than women to describe changes in beliefs regarding women's economic roles and in attitudes towards domestic and care work.
- Lebanese men were more likely to support women's economic participation than Syrian men; this was hypothesised as driven by concerns over exploitative working conditions that Syrian women may face because of their vulnerable legal status.
- The majority of Syrian and Lebanese men reported continued dominance in decision-making in their households
- Many men reported healthier communication and improved conflict resolution with their spouse but the worsening economic crisis increased relationship tension and disputes.
- There was a limited increase in the willingness and confidence to take actions to promote gender equality.

Among municipal officials and community leaders:

- The majority appreciated the modality and content of the sessions, particularly for learning

about how to identify gender inequalities, different forms of GBV and how to act to intervene and support survivors.

- Many municipal and community leaders questioned their ability to advocate for gender equality and the prevention of GBV in a context in which municipalities lack needed capacities and political will to do so.
- More limited change was evident in work with male community leaders and officials, many of whom continued to undermine the importance of giving attention to GBV and gender discrimination. Male opinion leaders dominated discussions around proposed activities coming out of the Gender Equality Cafés, for example, and repeatedly ignored women's recommendations.

Iraq methodology

Evaluating “Let’s Change” involved conducting qualitative research with 54 programme stakeholders across three points in time. At the baseline, 12 interviews took place in one location with six couples; these same couples were interviewed again at the endline. At the midline, in a different location from the baseline, 12 interviews were carried out with an additional six couples; four were interviewed again at the endline. Endline interviews also involved six community leaders. Four interviews were held with programme implementers who facilitated the curricula with couples and opinion leaders. One focus group discussion involved five programme implementers from Oxfam and WAHO. Data were triangulated with a literature review on GBV in Iraq, focusing on Diyala. Two adaptation and learning workshops, one with couples and one with leaders, obtained lessons and feedback from participants for future programming.

Iraq key findings

The evaluation of “Let’s Change” was also not designed to measure IPV prevalence as it was beyond the budget of the project to do so in safe and ethical ways. Yet it assessed many other domains of change theorized as influenced through the programme. Some key findings are presented here.

The evaluation found:

- Changes related to the concept of violence and power
 - Positive changes in couples’ justifications of and perceptions towards IPV, and more understanding of different types of violence were observed at the endline compared to the baseline.
 - The concept of ‘power’ was not easy for some participants to grasp but understanding grew in the later stages of the intervention.
 - Many couples reported an increased commitment to reducing corporal punishment (identified as a key trigger of IPV) and reported more active communication with children and efforts to raise their sons and daughters more equally.
 - Many couples reported that men increasingly refrained from using violence and couples adopted ‘diplomacy’ as a new strategy in communication along with staying calm and trying not to escalate conflict. Yet most women and men still believed IPV to be a private matter at the endline.

- Changes related to gender-equitable attitudes and practices
 - Some women and men reported differences in women's decision-making, including women having more of a right to refuse to have sex, gaining more control over social affairs and mobility, and providing input to household decisions. They still considered men as having a primary role in decision-making, however, which speaks to the strength of this norm.
 - At the baseline, most men and women reported that it is taboo for men to perform domestic and care work. Yet at the endline, many couples had taken some steps (albeit limited) towards men's support in this domain, with men reporting more confidence in taking on some caregiving and domestic work.
 - At the endline, there was more openness among men and women to the idea that women could take paid work.
- Changes related to relationship practices
 - More constructive, frequent and positive communication within couples was reported.
 - Couples described spending more quality time with each other, such as having picnics or other social activities.

Participating in the couples curriculum sessions, especially for women, provided an important and rare opportunity to have time away from home in a safe environment. A UNDP staff member highlighted the unique achievement of women in this context publicly speaking about domestic and relationship

issues: "A lot of women who were our participants, for the first time they are able to discuss such issues related to their marital status, their relationships, their sexuality that is one. Usually family issues, it is not considered a good idea to discuss in front of others. For the first time they have the capacity and courage to discuss this in front of others. Before no one was able to talk although everyone was experiencing violence but because of social pressure they never thought they could open and discuss in front of others. This programme and training provided them opportunities to talk, to find a solution. Initially they thought being a woman means accepting violence from husbands or any family members."

The take-home exercises comprised an important component of the sessions, strengthening understanding and skills. Time was allocated at the beginning of every session to review previous learning materials but for illiterate participants, this was problematic. The endline evaluation suggested alternatives to enhance the experience and learning/practice opportunities for this group of participants, such as by using posters with images rather than text or having a discussion to recall what stood out for participants from the previous session. The reflection sessions removed from the curriculum ("Session 10: Pausing for Reflection" and "Session 18: Reflecting on Our Journey So Far") should have been maintained to better include illiterate participants.

- Changes among community leaders
 - Many community leaders appraised the programme positively.
 - Some still believed IPV was a legitimate action for men to discipline women or that women brought violence on themselves.
 - The research suggested that overall, community leaders did not experience the

same level of transformation as the couples. The impact on female opinion leaders was more visible than on male opinion leaders; many female opinion leaders reported greater awareness of their rights and noted how the programme had helped to raise their self-esteem and confidence as leaders.

- Accepting more equitable decision-making and the division of labour among men and women remained challenging for many leaders. A few community leaders stated that their communication skills had improved in terms of accepting different views within their own families. Many leaders continued to enforce the same values of male domination,

however, whether in their awareness-raising sessions or in their community daily interventions. This was identified as a limitation given the significant influence and power leaders have in their communities.

The endline evaluation suggested that WAHO, the local organization that administrated the opinion leader component, would have benefitted from more support, including to manage patriarchal backlash. It also would have been useful to hold refresher trainings and offer ongoing support through coordination meetings with opinion leaders to aid their journeys of change and foster accountability, as was done with the original “Indashyikirwa” model in Rwanda.

A decorative graphic featuring a large yellow circle positioned on a white curved line that separates a light gray upper section from a dark blue lower section.

Lessons Learned

Important lessons on adapting the “Indashyikirwa” model have emerged from synthesizing and comparing the experiences of the two pilots in Iraq and Lebanon. They include the following.

Both partners of couples need to come together for some aspects of the couples curriculum for it to be considered a couples programme faithful to the model.

In Iraq, although this approach was new to the context, many participants welcomed a rare opportunity to participate together and noted it supported significant changes in their relationships. In Lebanon, men and women strongly appreciated combined groups; some staff saw these as more transformative. This suggests that couples programming can be feasible and beneficial even in settings where it seems taboo or novel, and where programme staff could be surprised or stretched beyond their initial comfort zones. It is nonetheless critical to monitor for risks and backlash to combined sessions, especially in contexts where this is taboo.

The value of couples programming builds on increasing evidence of greater gender transformation when men and women come together at least for some sessions or programme content.¹² In both pilots, it was appropriate and important to separate men and women for some sessions, especially for more sensitive topics. If it is not feasible or appropriate to work with men and women together as couples, programmers are encouraged to adapt a different model designed to work with men and women who are not necessarily couples, such as “Stepping Stones” originally designed by the Salamandar Trust.

Give ample attention to ensure safe and effective recruitment of participants.

In both pilots, as was the case in Rwanda, it worked well to recruit couples through a livelihoods programme. This approach builds on evidence suggesting the value of combining gender-transformative programming with some form of economic empowerment.¹³ In Lebanon, recruiting men through women was not very successful in ensuring men’s active engagement with the couples curriculum. This also put a heavy onus on women. Direct recruitment by implementing organizations where staff explained benefits and relevance to potential male and female participants could have helped allay concerns reported by female participants around trying to recruit male participants.

It is important to frame this programme as a means to promote healthy relationships rather than to prevent IPV, which can be stigmatizing and/or generate backlash.¹⁴ Another recommendation for future recruitment offered through the endline evaluation in Lebanon is to use key male influencers or testimonials from previous participants to reduce the stigma of being involved in such programmes. Another recruitment lesson from Lebanon is to ensure that relatives or neighbours are not enrolled in the same groups as this can limit openness and confidentiality. The Lebanon pilot further discovered that it can be stigmatizing to have married and non-married women in the same groups, which again reinforces the importance of careful recruitment and ideally maintaining the focus on only working with couples in the same sessions.

12 Jewkes, R., Willan, S., Heise, L., Washington, L., Shai, N., Kerr-Wilson, A., Gibbs, A., Stern, E., and Christofides, N. (2021). Design and Implementation of Interventions to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Associated With Success: Reflections from What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls? Global Programme. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18: 12129.

13 Gibbs, A., and Bishop, K. (2019). *Combined Economic Empowerment and Gender Transformative Interventions*. What Works to Prevent Violence.

14 Michau, L., Horn, J., Bank, A., Dutt, M., and Zimmerman, C. (2015). Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls: Lessons from practice. *The Lancet* 385: 1672-1684.

In Iraq, a recruitment lesson was to engage opinion leaders who more clearly accept gender equality and oppose IPV before enrolling in the training. “Let’s Change” faced fewer challenges to involving men; many men were recruited first for the couples curriculum as they were the primary participants of the livelihoods programme used as the platform for recruitment. Implementing partners then directly communicated the aims of the programme to couples together. It is important to monitor for risks of harm and backlash especially when recruiting couples through men.

Adaptation of this model requires careful consideration of how to actively engage men.

In Lebanon, employing only female facilitators may have dissuaded men from actively engaging. In Iraq, male and female co-facilitators saw more active engagement from men. Many “Stronger Together” facilitators believed that having male facilitators would allow men to be more open, especially around more sensitive topics. The unbalanced ratio of men and women in many mixed groups in Lebanon could further discourage men from actively participating.

The final evaluation from Lebanon noted that “men’s participation in “Stronger Together” was deprioritized in favour of focusing on the engagement of women as part of its integration within the broader women economic participation programme. This decision allowed participants whose household has no male members, or who were unable to invite (or persuade) a male member, to participate in the ‘Stronger Together’ workshops and benefit from an in-depth discussion of gender equality and gender-based violence.” This suggests that a model focused more on women’s empowerment may have been more appropriate, however, rather than de-prioritizing men’s participation in a couples programme.

In Iraq, the cash incentive was critical for men’s initial participation in the couples programme, although

motivations to engage changed over time, including as men witnessed benefits for themselves and their relationships first-hand, and through facilitators who encouraged their active participation and engagement. It could also be helpful to have some separate sessions for men, with a male facilitator, to foster their involvement. These should be complemented with sessions that bring men and women together.

Adaptation of “Indashyikirwa” (or any curriculum-based approach) needs to plan for careful recruitment, appropriate training and ongoing support for facilitators.

The facilitators and implementing organization(s) should be equipped to recognize and address various forms of resistance to the content. This issue came up in both pilots. Challenges in creating safe spaces also emerged in both, including in terms of participants knowing each other outside group settings and potential discrimination against unmarried women by married women.

Facilitators need to be carefully trained and supported to help ensure safe spaces. Peer support through the group-based approach of the curricula appeared to be an empowering methodology, particularly among women and during COVID-19 lockdowns. Facilitators who can ensure safe spaces; promote participatory, critical reflection; and who themselves embrace and embody the values and practices promoted in the curriculum related to gender equality and healthy relationships are fundamental to such approaches.

It is important to plan for some enabling environment activities to support implementation of the couples curriculum, even while modifying other aspects of the “Indashyikirwa” model.

In Lebanon, engaging opinion leaders was an important initiative yet in two out of five villages, opinion leaders trainings

took place in areas without couples curriculum activities. While this was in response to a gender audit, it does not align with the model's strategy of engaging opinion leaders to complement the couples curriculum.

Although "Stronger Together" initiated Gender Equality Cafés, many participants were not confident enough to speak up or take action against GBV and advocate for women's economic participation. Sessions did not always allow time for participatory dialogue and decision-making. Moreover, only one café was implemented by the endline evaluation given delays in the opinion leaders curriculum. In Lebanon's endline evaluation, a recommendation to support a more enabling environment is to develop a platform for peer-to-peer advocacy for participants who complete the couples curriculum. This could help create impetus to challenge entrenched social norms and structural obstacles to gender equality and enhance women's economic participation. In Iraq, a critical recommendation is to engage in advocacy to change existing norms, laws and policies that impede shifts encouraged through "Let's Change."

Pre-implementation adaptation was not sufficient; the two pilots made ongoing modifications to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and, in Lebanon, the economic crisis.

The pilots took place in very challenging and rapidly changing contexts, which required adaptive and responsive programming to factors that were not pre-planned. After the full pilot implementation, teams made additional revisions based on their practical experiences, participant feedback and evaluation data. It was useful to consider adaptation as a continual process rather than a single event. Adaptations in both settings benefitted from having multiple voices from diverse groups involved through consultations with local and international

stakeholders. Both adaptations also benefitted from flexible funding that allowed responsive programming.

It is important to have a substantial inception period when adapting this model, especially for new programmes or in very different settings.

This was the first adaptation of "Indashyikirwa" in the Arab States. The lessons learned demonstrate the significant differences between the contexts for both pilots and Rwanda. The inception phases of the two pilots took three to nine months, a period critical to design and adapt the model, including to ensure the curricula were relevant. Ideally, the pilots would have applied a more rigorous pre-test with a subset of similar couples and opinion leaders targeted for actual implementation. This could have helped foresee some implementation challenges, provided more opportunities for facilitators to practice and receive feedback, and helped to challenge certain assumptions in programme design, such as the benefits and challenges of bringing men and women together for couples programming in Lebanon.

Adaptation is a skill in and of itself that requires internal and external support and dedicated leadership.

Pilots in both countries led and were actively involved in adapting the "Indashyikirwa" programme. Engaging Iraqi and Lebanese partners as co-designers and facilitators ensured that the adapted versions of the programme were more likely culturally relevant.¹⁵ The adaptation and development of both programmes heavily drew on external support, including from the second author of this report as the technical adviser and to a lesser degree from the first author to reflect on fidelity to the original model.

The time and effort to bring various stakeholders together for adaptation processes should be factored into the programme design, budget,

¹⁵ Berkel, C., Mauricio, A. M., Schoenfelder, E., and Sandler, I. N. (2011). Putting the Pieces Together: An integrated model of program implementation. *Prevention Science* 12(1), 23–33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-010-0186-1>.

monitoring and evaluation.¹⁶ It is also important to include strong and coordinated monitoring and evaluation systems to support adaptive programming. Limitations identified in Lebanon undermined the collection of and access to real-time information to inform adaptive programming.

A coherent theory of change should underlie adaptation.

It is not clear if either pilot had a well-structured or developed theory of change, which can help identify aspects of evidence-based programming and fidelity that need to be maintained. For instance, a theory of change could have helped to clarify how intended changes, including improved relationship quality among couples as a pathway to reduce tension, conflict and IPV, require dedicated work with couples, as was done in Iraq. Both pilots confronted limitations in terms of considering how the theory of change behind the opinion leaders curriculum and ongoing engagement with opinion leaders is intended to support enabling environments for couples curriculum participants. A dedicated theory of change workshop and development during the inception phase would help to reflect on and revise the theory of change as needed throughout implementation.

Future adaptations of “Indashyikirwa” should consider adding more content on violence against children and positive parenting.

The adaptation in Iraq gave more attention to violence against children and positive parenting and appeared to have more positive impacts in

this domain. It demonstrated the potential of working with couples who are also co-parents to better address the intersections of IPV and violence against children. This aligns with recommendations to the original “Indashyikirwa” programme that the “curriculum would have benefitted from more carefully articulating the negative consequences of harsh physical punishment against children and challenging the notion that corporal punishment is effective as a form of discipline. While the programme achieved noteworthy benefits for children, without more explicitly emphasizing positive parenting techniques and the intersections of (violence against children) and IPV, the opportunity to address both forms of violence was not fully maximized.”¹⁷

The World Bank and Rwanda’s Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, in partnership with CARE Rwanda, the Rwanda Men’s Resource Center and the Rwanda Women’s Network, adapted and implemented another version of “Indashyikirwa” with a session entitled “Our Children Are Our Future” to identify the consequences of GBV on children and how couples can commit to a legacy of non-violence. Any adaptations of the “Indashyikirwa” couples curriculum should review and consider integration of this additional session. Current adaptations of “Indashyikirwa,” including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Syria, are including this session. UNDP Iraq has secured funding to implement “Let’s Change” in other parts of the country and plans to use this next version of the programme.

16 Stern, E., Martins, S., Stefanik, L., Uwimphuwe, S., and Yaker, R. (2018). Lessons Learned from Implementing Indashyikirwa in Rwanda: An adaptation of the SASA! approach to prevent and respond to intimate partner violence. *Evaluation & Program Planning* 71: 58-67.

17 Stern, E., Heise, L., Chatterji, S., and Dunkle, K. (2020). How the Indashyikirwa Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Programme in Rwanda Influenced Parenting and Violence Against Children. *Journal of Family Violence*: 185-197.



Conclusion

This report illustrates how an assessment of adaptation fidelity is a valuable component of a comprehensive evaluation and can help unpack the strengths and limitations of programme elements that influence outcomes.¹⁸ As interest in and needs and funding for effective and ethical GBV prevention grow, more programme teams will find themselves adapting evidence-based models. This report provides important insights on pre-implementation and responsive adaptations across two settings, including a consideration of COVID-19 and the economic crisis in Lebanon.

Bringing to light the need to carefully consider and balance various contextual demands and challenges with fidelity to the core components

of “Indashyikirwa” offers a helpful example as adaptation experiences evolve. The pilots in Iraq and Lebanon suggest that “Indashyikirwa” offers promise for adaptation as well as integration into livelihoods programming, including in crisis settings.

Finally, critical lessons on effective and ethical adaptation have come from these experiences, including the importance of learning from original implementers or evaluators of an adapted model, taking time to carefully understand core components of a model, meaningfully involving local stakeholders to identify adaptation needs, and applying an adaptive management approach to facilitate both planned and responsive adaptations.

¹⁸ James Bell Associates (2009). Evaluation Brief: Measuring Implementation Fidelity. https://www.bellassociates.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/evaluation_brief_measuring_implementation_fidelity.pdf.



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