



Opportunities for Meaningful Engagement with Survivors of Gender-based Violence (GBV) in Kenya: Recommendations from three Counties

BACKGROUND

In July 2022, the State and County Gender Directors in Bungoma, Kilifi, and Samburu convened meetings with over 60 GBV survivors to hear their views on services, seek recommendations to guide further improvements, and explore new types of partnership opportunities. This brief offers highlights from each meeting with a view to *mobilizing, inspiring, and supporting collective leadership and complimentary efforts to address the root causes of GBV, together with empowering women and girls, and promoting Champions for violence-free homes, schools, and communities*¹.

METHODOLOGY

A guiding set of questions was developed prior to the dialogue, and each session was conducted in the local language. The Gender Directors for the County and State identified and invited survivor groups (or survivors, where no support groups exist) and participation was entirely optional. A report for each county dialogue session was developed and the findings were consolidated into this single report, along with possible programming implications and recommendations. 89 survivors of GBV (27 male and 62 female) participated in these sessions.

SURVIVOR VIEWS & EXPERIENCE IN AND OF SUPPORT GROUPS

Benefits of Membership in a Support Group

Survivors reported that they were motivated to join a Support Group for:

- **Support through the healing and recovery process** - sharing experiences, providing, or seeking encouragement, and learning from those who have already recovered. They reported that the Survivor Group provides a safe space for them to open up about their experience and seek help.
- **Assistance to access services** – having guidance and/or a peer to help them access services, especially access to justice. For instance, in Kilifi County, all of the participants in the dialogue reported that they joined the group because they believed
- this would be the best way to ensure that their voices are heard, and their cases are handled expeditiously.
- **Access to financial and in-kind support** – through group savings and social funds. This is a key motivator for joining by both survivors and parents of children who experienced GBV.
- **Opportunities to help others** – sensitizing others to improve prevention efforts, and inspiring survivors that recovery is possible. It is important to note that some members of Survivors Groups, especially men, have not experienced GBV, but join because they wish to help their children.

IDEAS TO ADVANCE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT...

The capacity building agenda for Survivor Support Groups should consider both knowledge/skills building AND asset building according to the benefits/needs required by the members. Groups should be encouraged to hold reflective sessions on their ability to provide each benefit and identify creative ways to be more responsive. This could include forming partnerships with other agencies where they could refer members, seek training, and obtain in-kind donations to address the urgent needs of Survivors – particularly when they have to seek safe shelter outside of their traditional home.

Benefits of
Support
Groups

¹ Excerpt from the Kenya-Finland Bilateral GBV Programme's Theory of Change.

Perceived Role of Support Groups

Members of Support Groups want to play an active role in assisting survivors of GBV, below is a list of ways they currently intervene or wish to intervene in new cases:

- **Direct service delivery** – including counselling, and in-kind assistance to address the urgent needs of survivors.
- **Assisting survivors to access services and support** – providing information and guidance to navigate the system especially health and legal support, so that survivors (and their families) know their rights and access available services
- **Provide shelter** or assist survivors to find a safe place to stay** - especially with a parent or relative.
- **Community sensitization and awareness** – including mobilizing support for survivors, promoting reporting, and providing information to increase reporting and help to reduce GBV.
- **Reporting new incidences of GBV** to the relevant authorities.
- **Establish partnerships with service providers** who will assist Support Groups to receive/provide referrals.
- **Negotiation and mediation**** in situations where there is a risk of GBV or an incident has occurred.

*** Interventions that pose safety risks to the service provider.*

IDEAS TO ADVANCE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT...

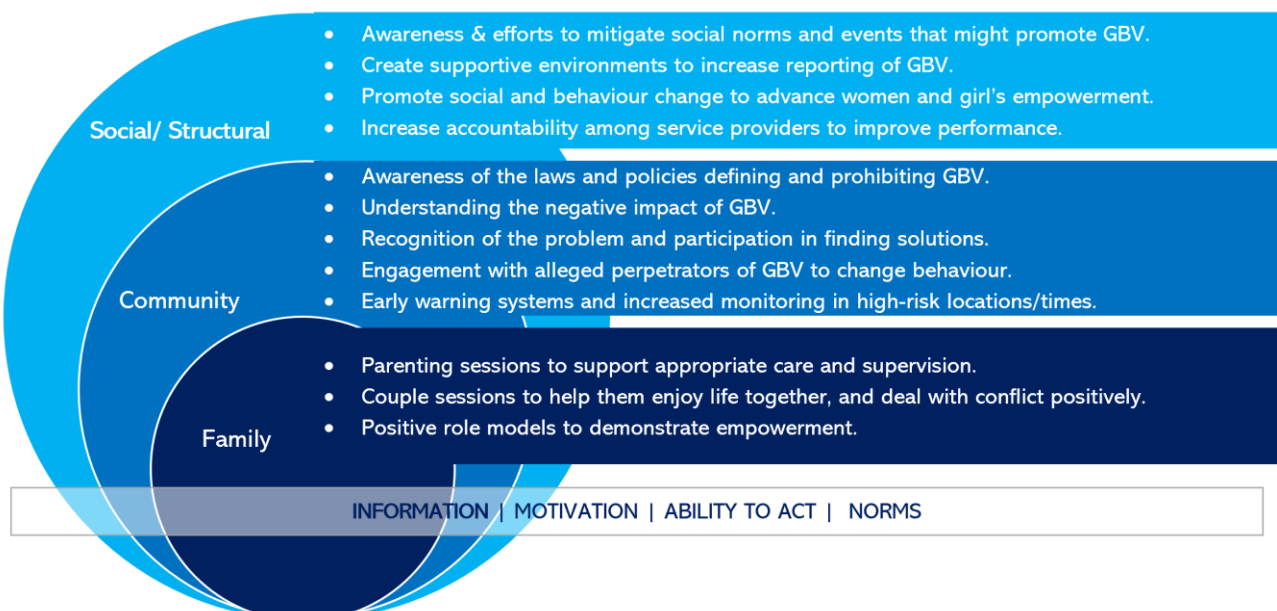
Members of Support Groups are, with limited financial support or training, engaging with survivors of GBV in many ways. To assure safety and quality of these services, certified trainings should be provided to Group members to equip them with the essential knowledge and skills. Critical areas of focus should include Counselling Skills, Parenting Skills, Couple Communication/Counselling, and Safeguarding. In addition, Support Groups could be supported to establish a routine system for preparing and delivering dignity kits/care packages to survivors to address urgent needs at the community-level.

Role of Support Groups

OPPORTUNITIES TO PREVENT GBV

When asked what kinds of actions could prevent GBV, Survivors highlighted engagements across multiple levels – their responses are grouped across family, community, and societal level interventions – see following page.

Actions that could be taken across different levels of society



OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE RESPONSE

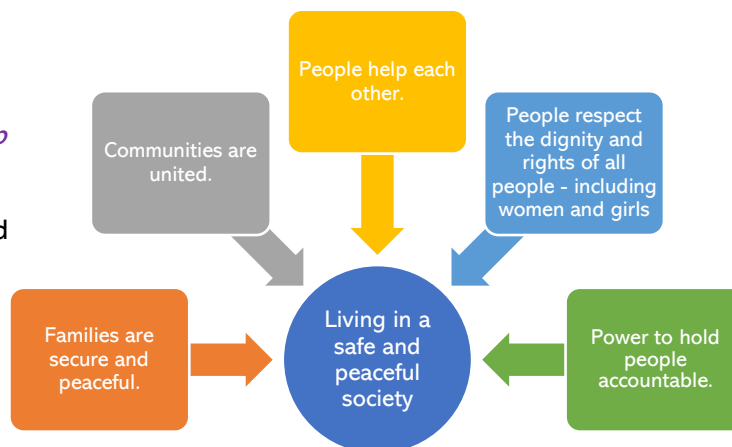
Among the key issues identified by Support Groups, the needs can be grouped into three broad sets of concerns: (1) limited opportunities to assist survivors, (2) limited protection for survivors and witnesses—including protection from discrimination and poor treatment; and (3) poor quality services. Amid these concerns, Survivors also offered new ideas and approaches that would enable them to play a more active role in improving care and support services. See table below:

ISSUES	IDEAS & INNOVATIONS TO CONSIDER
Limited opportunities to assist survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist Support Groups to form a Network. Improve communication across groups through online platforms, such as What's App to facilitate information sharing and exchanges. Develop materials for Survivors to explain the benefits of Support Groups and provide information on how to access services. Encourage service providers to refer survivors to Support Groups, or seek permission to allow Support Groups to contact survivors.
Protection of survivors and witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen Victim and Witness Protection by assisting Survivors to promote awareness of the law and improving community watch programmes.
Quality of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide handbooks and other resource materials to support learning within Support Groups – especially for those already providing services to their members and others in the community. Enrol GBV survivors in certified training programs to assist them to deliver services within their respective groups and communities. Train survivors and their families on social accountability tools to hold service providers accountable. Create opportunities for learning between Support Groups through exchanges and links to other service providers.

IMPORTANT INSIGHTS & INNOVATIONS

Use language that inspires collective leadership

Survivors report that GBV is largely seen as a women's issue and expressed concern with the stigma and discrimination against survivors and those who report cases. During the dialogue, Survivors were invited to offer a vision of what a safe and peaceful society might look like. This vision, summarized in the graphic (pictured right) includes secure and peaceful families; united communities; helping attitudes and behaviours; respect for the dignity and rights of all people, and power to hold people accountable for their actions. Amid the discussion, the survivors noted the need for everyone's efforts to support change. **This vision emphasizes more inclusive language, such as safety or violence-free, in place of GBV reduction or elimination – signalling the collective gains all members of society will achieve².**



Survivors/Support Groups as Service Providers

Having experienced the challenges of locating and accessing services, survivors are uniquely placed to accompany and support new survivors. Already, many are helping survivors but doing so without guidelines and formal training. In addition, within the Support Groups, there are underemployed nurses, social workers, Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) who are eager to play a more active role in assisting survivors as well as leading prevention efforts.

² This recommendation is in line with evidence from implementation which shows that use of the term 'power' instead of 'gender' allows for a more open discussion and is more likely to inspire social and behavior change.

Survivors/Support Groups as Service Providers (continued)

Support Groups could play a more strategic role in the delivery of survivor-centred care by:

Providing	Providing copies of Handbooks, Guidelines, and other Educational Materials to members in accordance with the services they are already providing, i.e., parenting sessions, peer support, basic counselling.
Linking	Linking with schools, Community Units (CUs), and/or religious institutions, to facilitate referrals and establish systems for regular service provision.
Enrolling	Enrolling selected members in certified training programmes to enable them to improve the quality of care, as well as improve safeguarding.
Establishing	Establishing a network for supportive supervision and systems for peer-to-peer learning.

Building a Culture of Accountability

All Survivors would like to see better performance in the management of GBV cases. **Survivors need more opportunities to increase their voice and influence change. With training and tools on social accountability, along with platforms to meet, Support Groups could bring attention to gaps in service delivery/quality, and provide feedback and suggestions to improve accountability**

Expanding the focus from capacity building to also include asset building

Support Groups are struggling to respond to the critical social welfare needs of survivors in the aftermath of an incident. Survivors often need basic hygiene and household items, and in some instances food packages or travel vouchers because they have been displaced from their home or community. In addition, as they are seeking medical care and pursuing their case through the justice system, they cannot always participate in their usual economic activities which exacerbates their already challenging situation. **Establishing a system for in-kind support within the groups would help them to address the critical needs of survivors who are often displaced from their home and do not have access to their personal belongings. Without their essential belongings**

KEY PROGRAMME ADAPTIONS IN LIGHT OF THE LEARNING & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Use more open language such as 'safer families, communities and schools' to broaden community participation and support for GBV prevention and response.
- 2 Focus on asset-building in the delivery of survivor-centred care to meet the basic needs associated with displacement/relocation away from the family home, and missed economic opportunities, i.e. dignity kits, care packages, or transportation subsidy.
- 3 Recognize and strengthen the role of Support Groups as service providers (in the broader community) to improve service accessibility and quality at the community level.
- 4 Work across multiple levels to mobilize complimentary efforts to build knowledge, skills, norms, and behaviours to make homes, schools, and communities safer, while also creating more supportive environments for survivors and witnesses to report and seek services.

CONCLUSION

The experience, ideas, and innovations proposed by GBV Survivors from Bungoma, Kilifi and Samburu County provides an important menu of options that local and international organizations, and government programmes should consider. Strengthening and scaling Support Groups holds tremendous potential for sustained transformational change in the delivery of survivor-centred care.

