Empowering Grassroots Women Leaders to SOAR

Strategise | **O**rganise | **A**dvocate and | **R**ise

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TALLAWAH
JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

GWED-G
Gulu Women's Economic
Development & Globalization

Contents

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Project leads

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Lorraine Smith van Lin is the Founder and Executive Director of Tallawah Justice for Women, a non-profit organization dedicated to connecting, equipping, and amplifying the voices of women grassroots leaders from the Global South. She is an international human rights lawyer, a dedicated advocate for the rights of victims and women, and has worked as a consultant on victim rights and gender. A former senior Prosecutor and Judge of the Parish Court in Jamaica, Lorraine has previously served as Director of the International Bar Association's Hague Office and Legal Adviser at Redress. In March 2022, Lorraine was appointed as one of the Patrons of "The Enforcement of the Right to Peace Global Advocacy Programme.

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Project Consultant

Emily Kaakyo Rubooga is a creative consultant and gender activist. Her work has centrally involved supporting non-profit organizations in fundraising, designing programmatic interventions, and developing campaign strategies that enhance their capacity to influence and communicate their impact. Kaakyo has worked predominantly in the non-profit sector in diverse contexts, including Liberia, Tanzania, and Uganda. She has more than ten years of experience in human rights programming, research, and advocacy, focusing on child protection and care, gender equity and social inclusion, governance, and social protection. Kaakyo has applied expertise in generating evidence to influence policy and programs, a demonstrated capacity to develop and implement research projects, substantial experience in development advocacy, and working within national policy processes to promote change. Kaakyo is spearheading efforts to build local capacity to apply behavioral science insights and qualitative research methods to help organizations improve the design and delivery of social interventions, including social and public communication strategies. Kaakyo is a Mandela Washington Fellow (2015) and a NOREC Fellow (2012).

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Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the world saw the power and fortitude of women leaders. They stood up and stood out in their communities, districts, and countries- in politics and on the global stage, responding to a crisis that descended on humankind and threatened to destroy the fabric of modern society. Yet, while the world has trumpeted the remarkable leadership of women in corporate and political settings, not enough has been said about women who lead at the grassroots level, about their life-saving response and resilience amidst COVID-engendered economic chaos and unprecedented levels of domestic and sexual violence within families and communities.

At the root of the problem is a misperception about women grassroots leaders and the nature of their organizations. Despite their critical role in providing human services, they struggle to attract meaningful and sustained public and political support due to a misperception among the public and policymakers that their work is merely charitable assistance provided by volunteers with the help of benevolent donors. There is also a perception that the main task of grassroots organizations is to respond to crises where there is an immediate or urgent need.

Gaps in staff capacity and resources at the local government level to ensure that the social care and support services respond to urgent needs are indeed being filled by many grassroots organizations. However, the scope of their work is much broader and should be financed. This is more than a

funding issue. It requires a complete reframing, repackaging, and communication of the work of grassroots women leaders and their organizations to attract increased public financing and make the investment in their work a policy priority.

Even where grassroots women's organizations overcome funding constraints and can afford to meet operational costs, their staff do not necessarily have the core competence— knowledge, skills, attitudes, and technical approaches they need to be effective. Many women-led grassroots organizations lack critical skills for advocacy, coalition building, government relations, peer learning and innovation, power mapping, multi-stakeholder dialogue, negotiation, policy formulation, convening and collaboration, and documentation. These gaps limit their effectiveness and efforts to achieve a broader, sustainable impact.

The social change outcomes grassroots women organizations seek are crafted, not conditioned, and a byproduct of the quality of interaction and interface between broader sets of actors in the community who have the potential to influence niche outcomes. Thus, initiatives that seek to influence broader systemic change— local governance processes, legislation, policies, social norms, and behavioral change to reduce inequalities, need to be explicitly structured to build relationships and networks that include the women leaders as well as policymakers and critical powerbrokers who can deliver sustained and scalable impact.

1.2 Overview of the report

This report draws on the findings of a survey among grassroots women survivor leaders in ten conflict-affected districts in Northern Uganda, commissioned by Tallawah Justice for Women, Gulu Women Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G), and the University of Nottingham School of Law. The survey gathered data from which to analyze the lived experiences and perspectives of the women leaders concerning:

• How women leaders are working to prevent and respond to domestic and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV);

• The pain points and constraints that the women leaders and their organizations face that affect their effectiveness and sustained impact;

• The systems and structures that are required to ensure sustained support for grassroots women leaders and their organizations to advance the agenda of ending violence against women and girls.

We defined grassroots women organizations as service-oriented organizations led by women working to improve the situation of individuals and communities. These grassroots organizations are small (estimated average annual budgets below $5000 per year) and exist primarily to address specific, localized needs within communities. This also includes movements and collectives where women have organically come together driven by the need to meet a collective goal- which is often the desire for change- including where they are also direct beneficiaries of the desired change.

One hundred and forty (140) women grassroots leaders participated in the interviews or Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) administered by a team of data collectors. Participants were purposively selected as survivors of sexual violence and for their role as leaders in their communities. The interviews were based on standardized but open questions designed to give a feel for these women leaders' thoughts and reveal potential response patterns. The respondents were chosen from 11 Districts— Gulu, Pader, Kitgum, Lamwo, Amuru, Nwoya, Moroto, Soroti, Lira, Arua, and Adjumani. In addition, and to deepen the analysis, the team administered an additional survey to twenty-one (21) randomly selected respondents.

While the sample interviewed was not statistically significant, several common themes and patterns emerged from the assessment. In addition, patterns emerged that provide insight into how women survivor leaders perceive leadership and their capabilities; the potential impacts of their initiatives; challenges and constraints; their general abilities, and how these affect the results they can achieve.

We deliberately include direct quotes from the women in the report as an affirmation of the power of their voices to effect change. In addition, we reflect, to the extent that we can, on the tension between their dedicated efforts to end SGBV and the frustration of doing too much with insufficient resources that they contend with daily. Finally, we analyze and contextualize the issues, locating them within broader structural parameters of inherent imbalances in how funding is administered, patriarchal and deep-rooted gender biases and limiting beliefs, and offering suggestions- to donors, policymakers, and even the women themselves- about the shift that must take place to dismantle structure and systems that prevent women grassroots leaders from rising.

1.3 Key Findings and Analysis

In synthesizing and interpreting the qualitative findings from the needs assessment, the research team used the internal logic and consistency in interview responses to develop narratives on how women-led organizations are leveraging different interventions, the varied entry points for their GBV programming, and potential impacts, and implications. These narratives provide a helpful methodological and analytical framework for understanding impact pathways and greater awareness of bottlenecks that grassroots women leaders and their organizations face. They also create new opportunities to address constraints.

We took a broad, collective view of grassroots women organizations' capacities and sought to understand where the collective strengths and constraints exist rather than exclusively focusing on individual entities. In analyzing the responses and the grassroots women's organizations' GBV interventions and activities, the research team utilized the "upstream, midstream, and downstream frameworks" assessment model to aggregate the views and responses and explain the perceived and potential impact and effectiveness.

The assessment does not and was not designed to assess any particular initiative or set of activities, nor was the undertaking intended to be a formal evaluation. Instead, this assessment sought to help the research team develop a more general picture of the context and potential pathways for relevant interventions to strengthen or reinforce the work of grassroots women leaders and their organizations.

The analytical frameworks used throughout this report invite readers to reflect on "how might change happen" and deepen their understanding of the critical levers that might propel change. In addition, analytical approaches further highlight the process - help us make change mechanisms visible and clarify connections between the variables of interest. As a result, the emerging explanations yield a solid base for judgments about what needs to happen.

Finding no. 1

Women grassroots leaders place significant emphasis on mid and downstream interventions

In general, women survivors and their grassroots organizations play a significant role in preventing, mitigating, and responding to violence against women, including building violence prevention and response systems in conflict-affected communities in Uganda. Their organizations help build violence prevention systems by empowering women through various economic activities, including village savings, loans, skills, and entrepreneurship training. For example, 82% of grassroots women interviewed indicated either being involved or supporting economic empowerment projects targeting women. In addition, they help women facing specific vulnerabilities to pursue concrete alternative livelihood opportunities through skill training, informal money lending services through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), and micro-enterprise development as a source of income and protection. Many women leaders and their organizations also help improve access to SGBV services. They work with GBV survivors to provide psychosocial support and referral information and contribute to reducing further harm and trauma. In addition, women leaders play an essential role in awareness-raising and information dissemination on SGBV.

While these efforts are laudable, we found that the current programming of most grassroots women leaders is focused to a large extent on downstream and midstream interventions. The downstream interventions attempt to address and change the effects of the problem, for example, by deploying tactical interventions, projects, and information campaigns to influence specific behaviors related to GBV. At the same time, midstream interventions seek to help women cope with and improve their ability to deal with poor social conditions and

immediate threats to their livelihood. However, many of these down and midstream interventions are also hampered by limited resources, lack of access to sustainable sources of funding, lack of access to critical political platforms, and limiting beliefs among the women leaders themselves.

The women leaders' activities have been focused on economic empowerment strategies and fostering women's agency and self-reliance, with less emphasis on upstream interventions targeted at addressing the source of the problem, namely social determinants and policy/structural barriers. There is a need to balance the focus on agency with attention to structural change. While the provision of direct services is essential, grassroots women organizations need to look upstream and work more effectively at addressing the determinants of social problems or the risk conditions that cause these problems and create the need for direct services in the first place.

Upstream interventions would support transformation in policies, practices, power dynamics, discriminatory social norms, or beliefs and attitudes, leading to a more profound and sustained impact and reducing GBV in the communities. In addition, it is critical to deal with the root causes of misaligned gender power relations at a familial, community, and cultural level, which glorifies misogyny and perpetuates violence against women and girls. This requires addressing the policies and processes that create social inequities. Finally, moving towards more transformational strategies and interventions that address specific gender interests like decision-making power, ownership, and representation is critical.

Finding no. 2

Women leaders spend insufficient time developing their leadership expertise and well-being

From the interviews and FGDs, it was clear that many women leaders viewed leadership through the lens of the traditional model of heroic leader (for example, politicians/ elected officials), where the focus is on the individual at the center leading change—the doer. This perception can prevent women leaders from exploring different leadership styles and approaches to the collective good of all. This is important because sustainable, structural/ systemic change typically requires many actors to be engaged and calls for multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Beyond local political engagement- for example, through election as councilors and representatives in local government- grassroots women leaders need to engage others as change-makers at all levels. There's a need to build their capacity for systems analysis, self-organization, and coordination. In addition, they need support in social mobilization and social/ behavior change communication to promote fundamental behavior change. There is also a need to help them build sustainable linkages and partnerships among various actors in the system for increased capacity to unblock systemic challenges. Equally important is the need to foster new mindsets

and support new ways of thinking among grassroots women's organizations and women leaders to make the most of these opportunities to leverage different entry points -beyond elections and politics - to prevent violence.

We also observed a need for grassroots women leaders to spend time and resources developing their leadership expertise and well-being. While many grassroots organizations aspire to be learning organizations, commitment to learning and continuous leadership development requires time, effort, and resources— which they lack, so they don't do. Consequently, many grassroots women leaders tend to focus on downstream and midstream interventions where they have more expertise, at the expense of broader strategic issues that would allow them to develop themselves and their organizations. Furthermore, in the context of scarcity within which many grassroots women leaders operate, ensuring their well-being while serving their communities is seen as a luxury they cannot afford. Yet, well-being is critical for grassroots women leaders' self-preservation and resilience, and it directly influences the type and quality of their impact as leaders in their communities.

| Finding no. **3** | There is an urgent need to address the chronic lack of sustainable funding for women-lead organisations |

Respondents indicated that the vast majority of available funding for GBV prevention and response is for short-term projects that can deliver measurable outcomes quickly and often do not include financing administrative costs. A lack of financial resources, including general operating costs, insufficient technical and operational capacity to deliver effectively, and obstacles to forging partnerships that can help them circumvent/overcome constraints they face, means that progress is suboptimal. The grassroots leaders pointed out that their organizations struggle to maintain viability and sustain their vital initiatives because they are under-resourced and increasingly dependent on their capacities. Yet, despite this, they are increasingly called on to respond to diverse needs and paradoxically required to do more with fewer resources.

Even with project-based funding, grassroots women's organizations only receive a small fraction of the available financial resources. This severely curtails their opportunities to lead prevention and protection work in communities and to actively push for women's strategic gender needs and systemic change for women and girls. Our survey revealed that it remains particularly challenging for women-led grassroots organizations to attract funding mainly because of the actual or perceived risk. Current funding modalities often assume that sufficient and functional organizational structures exist in these grassroots organizations with good institutional and administrative capabilities. Respondents cited barriers to financing as a critical determinant of whether grassroots initiatives can be sustained and how they need to be maintained.

While the positive impacts of existing programs and investments can be observed, many initiatives are often limited in scope and geographical coverage. In addition, the sector is rife with a chronic lack of philanthropic and government funding for violence prevention and programmatic protection interventions. Philanthropic funding would support efforts to address the root cause of GBV, which necessitates a more strategic, long-term approach than project funding usually allows. Donors must invest in women-led organizations to implement longer-term interventions to address violence against women. For example, initiatives that seek to change behavior require flexible, long-term, consistent engagement working with the same target populations over a long period. This requires innovative funding modalities, donor/funder flexibility, and strong advocates for grassroots women organizations within the development sector. Capacity building as actionable learning can potentially make grassroots organizations more effective in pushing for broader systemic change; however, few funders/donors resource it.

Lack of financing constraints the ability of grassroots women organizations to invest in essential "indirect" expenses like rent, accounting software, or implement critical movement-building activities like hosting meetings and negotiations with other partners or joining advocacy coalitions to promote their cause. Without the money for indirect costs, grassroots organizations cannot effectively implement interventions, potentially making them less attractive to future funders. But it is also proving difficult for grassroots women's organizations to innovate and expand to scale or sustain results beyond the project funding period.

| Finding no. **4** | Grassroots women organisations need allies-key relationships and partnerships |

Our survey found that grassroots women's organizations are barely visible, and there is a marked absence of grassroots women's voices in crucial decision-making spaces. This means that important decisions are often made in their communities and within public spheres without the active engagement of grassroots women's voices. Advancing women's rights calls for more significant investment in grassroots women's movements and leadership to push for broader systemic change. The lack of women's networks and associations at the grassroots level and input at the macro-level needs attention. Donors, funders, and other partners must directly support grassroots women's organizations to work to transform policies, practices, power dynamics, social norms, or mindsets to prevent violence.

Investing in women's empowerment programs needs to be part of a menu of coordinated investments that can collectively create positive systemic change for women and girls. This includes capacity building and training activist leaders, promoting legislative and policy solutions, providing spaces for convening and collaboration, and funding grassroots women's movements.

There is a need to enhance the voice and capacity of grassroots women leaders at the community and national political level to demand greater accountability and responsiveness from public service providers. This includes defending constituents' interests, engaging in policy formulation and implementation to ensure accountability, demanding transparency and responsiveness, and holding duty-bearers accountable for delivering quality services.

Increasing grassroots women's leadership and participation in decisions that affect their lives require explicit attention to reduce grassroots women's political and social exclusion and strengthen their participation and representation in political decision-making at the micro and macro level. Fostering the emergence of a core constituency of women based on their grassroots identity to ensure that grassroots women's voice is heard and listened to will invariably lead to favorable outcomes for women's agendas.

Finding no.5 — There is a need to rethink relationships / partnerships

Finally, our assessment found that grassroots women organizations focused primarily on securing finances and achieving project outcomes rather than less quantifiable gains such as building key relationships. However, cultivating positive (or helpful) external relationships is essential to gaining support to drive an agenda forward and build constituencies of support, stronger partnerships, collaborations, and institutional linkages to increase outcomes.

Unfortunately, partnerships, particularly with development partners, donors, and INGOs, are often driven by organizational systems rather than a desire to facilitate grassroots women organizations' programmatic needs and interventions on systemic, complex, and multifaceted social issues. The type and number of grassroots organizations that are funded are often dependent on the funders' interest and the organization's ability to meet the application criteria.

Few funders understand and are prepared to offer funding opportunities to grassroots organizations, resulting in very few women-led organizations receiving funding as primary recipients/direct grantees. These organizations are constantly relegated to depending on larger, more organized NGOs who sub-grant funds to the grassroots organizations in exchange for engagement on a specific project or program. The larger organizations are responsible for the overall grant management, including project outcomes and administrative and reporting requirements.

The sub-grantee rarely gains experience in these areas, rendering them ineligible for subsequent grants. This situation then leads to a continuous cycle difficult for women-led grassroots organizations to break.

In many cases, roles performed by women survivor leaders as principal agents of change are carried out voluntarily. Indeed, even though these "volunteers' are operating with a significant resource deficit, some donors/funders often rely heavily upon the idea of community volunteerism, thus perpetuating the notion of unpaid labour at the grassroots level. While it is essential to start from the strengths and resources that communities already have and build on those when working with and through communities, we need to be cautious in the assumptions we make of what assets communities can leverage. We must ensure that women leaders are not inadvertently overburdened and overwhelmed and focus more on putting formal systems in place to help them cope.

We found that grassroots women leaders and their organizations must establish long-term partnerships to foster sustainable organizations. This will require the commitment of donors and other key stakeholders to invest in building the institutional and administrative capacities-processes and systems to support programs, operations, and grant management. More importantly, the unique value that grassroots women organizations bring to partnerships based on their own identities and experiences compared to other institutions is a resource that should be captured and used to justify why donors need to build and maintain a long-term relationship with them.

> **"Few funders understand and are prepared to offer funding opportunities to grassroots organizations, resulting in very few women-led organizations receiving funding as primary recipients/direct grantees."**

1.4 Findings at a glance

Figure 1: Average Annual Income of Grassroots Women Organisations interviwed (UGX)
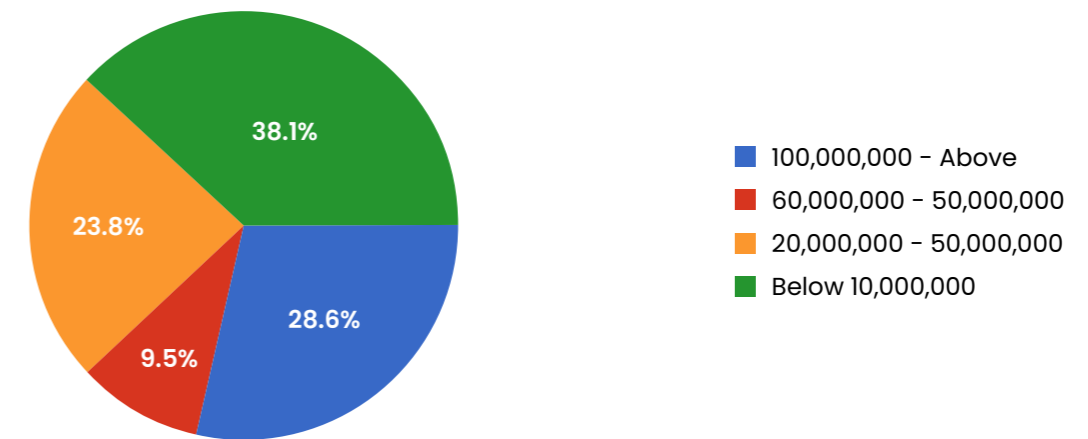

- 38.1%
- 28.6%
- 23.8%
- 9.5%

Legend:
- 100,000,000 - Above
- 60,000,000 - 50,000,000
- 20,000,000 - 50,000,000
- Below 10,000,000

Figure 2: Ways Grassroots Women Organizations are tackling SGBV

- Improving Access & Availability of SGBV services
- Advocating to uphold political commitments to end SGBV
- Addressing Women's Psychological Needs
- Skilling & Training Women & Girls
- Peacebuilding & Mediation
- Awareness, Raising & Sharing Critical Information
- Economic Empowerment Initiatives
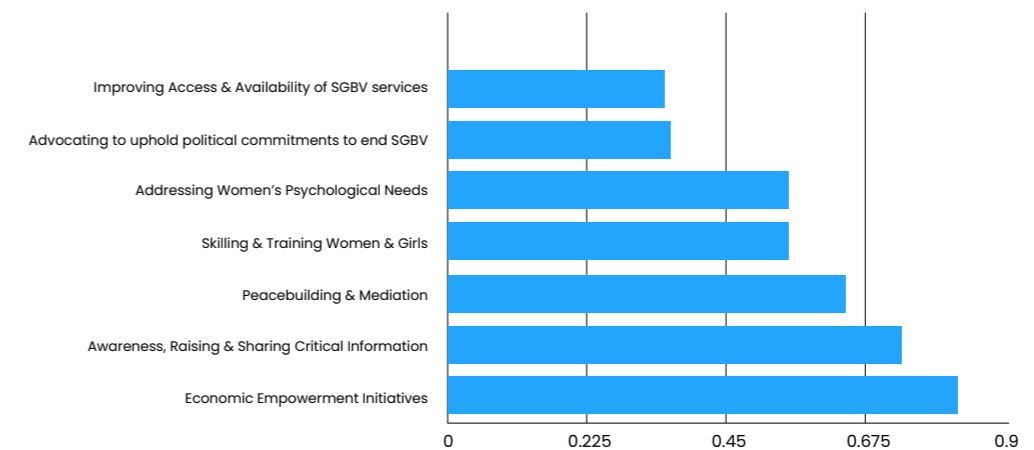
Figure 3: Source & Mix of Revenue for Grassroots Women Organizations

Legend: Yes / No

- International donors/funders
- Government (Public)
- Private Sector
- Savings (Own resources)
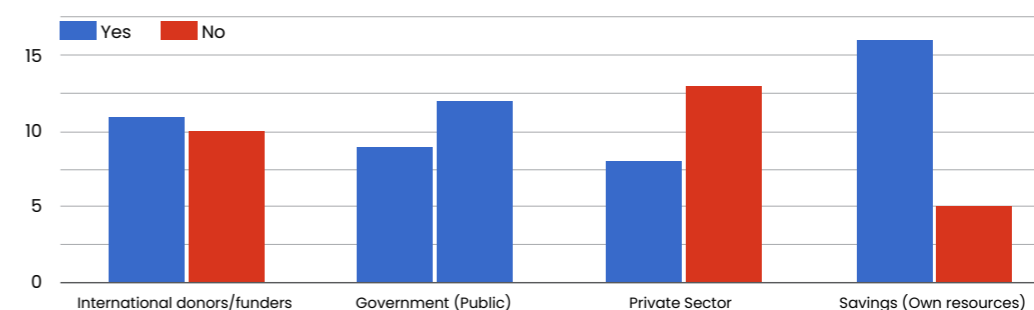
Figure 4: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Grassroots Women's Programming & Operations

- 9.5% — We have the same amount of resources and attention as before
- 90.5% — We have fewer resources and attention now
- We have more resources and attention now
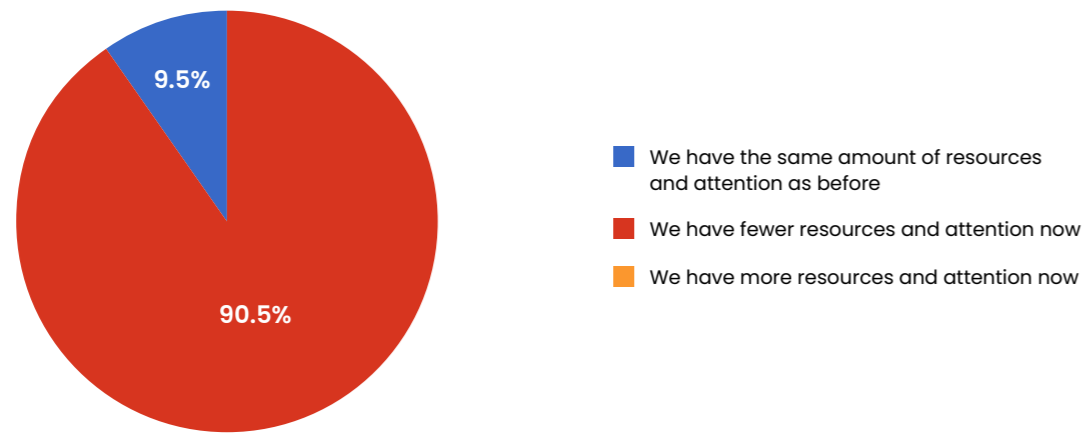
Figure 5: Top Programming ranked by respondents

Programming	%
Economic Justice & Rights	20%
Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights	22%
Gender-Based Violence	25%
Feminist Movement & Leadership	14%
Feminist Action for Climate Justice	8%
Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality	12%
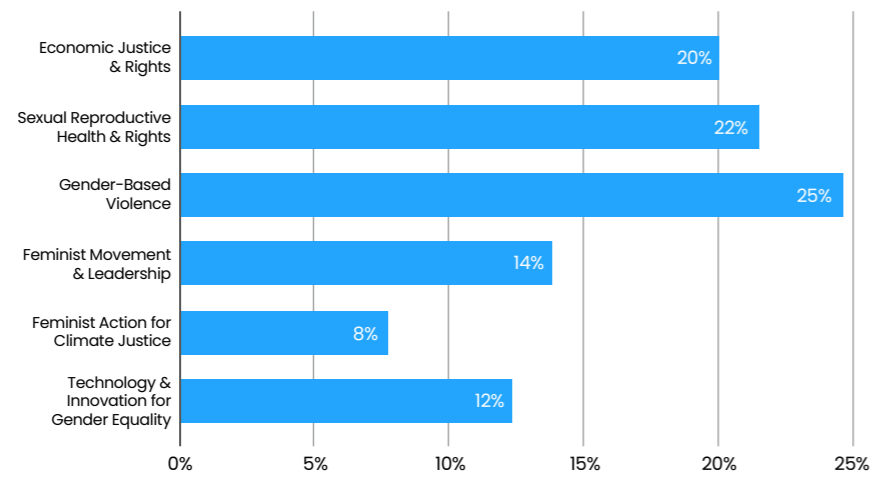
Figure 6: Individual ranking of prioritized programming areas

Legend: Not at all important, Slightly important, Important, Fairly important, Very important, No opinion
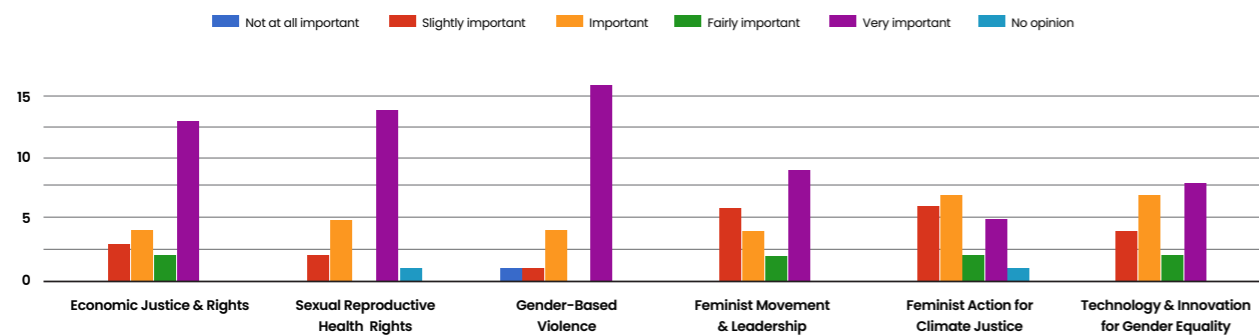
Figure 7: Top skills grassroots women leaders desire to improve

- 42.9% — Fundraising
- 19% — Data analysis
- 9.5% — Problem-solving
- 14.3% — Crisis management
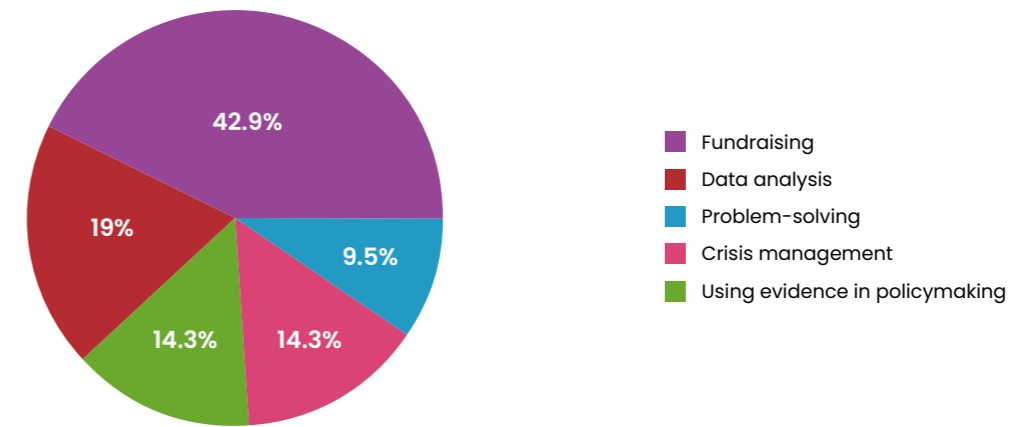- 14.3% — Using evidence in policymaking

Figure 8: Constraints to the attainment of advocacy & campaigning goals ranked by respondents

- Credibility, recognition & use of your research, analysis & presentation of policy positions
- Coordinating and strengthening partnerships to actively engage decision-makers/opinion shapers & the public
- Opportunities to participate in policy implementation
- Level of public awareness - raising awareness/people know about the issue.
- Behavior & attitudinal change/people care about the problem-people engage in discussing, socializing, and promoting the issue
- Increased engagement and growth of committed activists/supporters taking part in an issue - campaigning.
- Digression on commitments/issues

Figure 9: Top priorities to strengthen Internal Capability ranked by respondents

- 28.6% — Program Capability
- 28.6% — Advocacy & Campaigning
- 14.3% — Organisational Capability
- 28.6% — Fundraising Capability
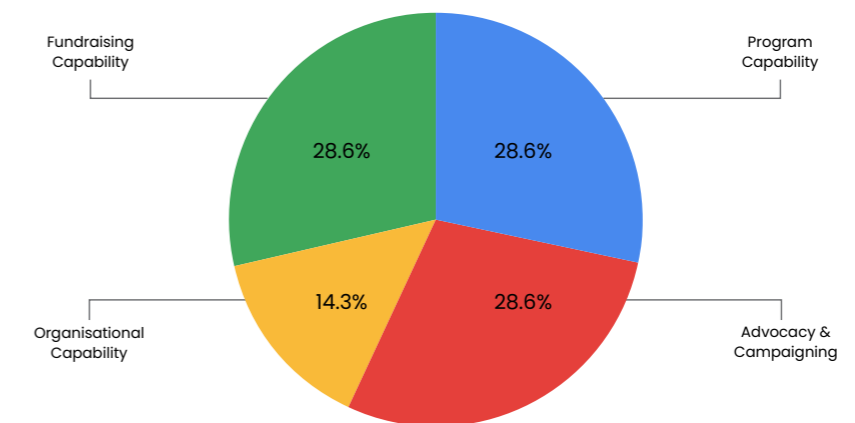
1.5 Recommendations

Meeting women's strategic gender needs (structural/systemic change) and achieving scale and sustained impact requires looking for ways to catalyze systemic change through policy implementation, women's equal participation in governance and decision-making, innovation in intervention design and delivery, and sustained behavior change. Based on this needs assessment, we make recommendations to strengthen the role of women's organizations in delivering GBV prevention and response services across five pathways: (i.e., Influence, Income, Impact, Innovation, and Identity).

Influence

Income

Innovation

Identity

Impact
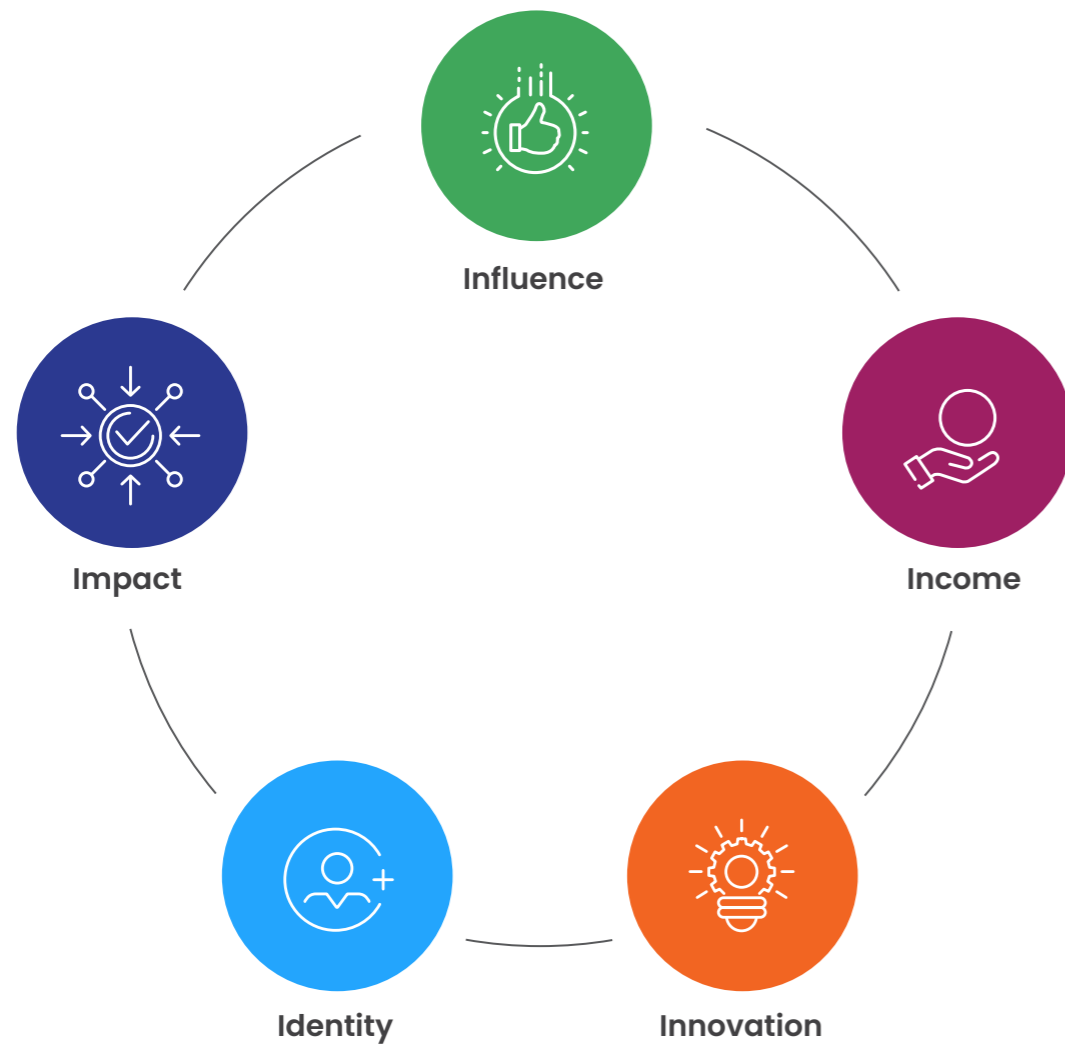
A. Influence
Expanding Women Leaders' Voices and Capacity

For policymakers, donors, and political leaders

• **Create** meaningful opportunities for bottom-up norm change.

• **Develop** a balance between strengthening women's agency and advocating for structural changes.

• **Create** and sustain a compelling grassroots women's movement identity as a positive force across civil society

• **Invest** directly and more in the capacity of communities to organize themselves and advocate effectively for longer-term improvements in social, political, and economic development for women and girls.

• **Strengthen** the voice, impact, and influence of women by building strong and vibrant women's networks and associations at the grassroots level

• **Strengthen** and expand women's civic engagement and political participation at the grassroots level through leadership development.

• **Build** a strong grassroots advocacy capacity to promote pro-poor and pro-

women policies and safety nets, promote social accountability, and enable women's voices as active participants and leaders for just change.

• **Build** Grassroots Women's Groups and Organizations' capacity to advocate, communicate and collaborate with radically diverse stakeholders to help stimulate new and more effective ways of working to achieve their goals.

• **Focus** on supporting essential movement-building activities like forming strong women's networks and coalitions; creating safe spaces for women's groups to collaborate, strategize, and build alliances to mobilize for change effectively is invaluable.

• **Provide** long-term funding, training, and general operating support to grassroots women organizations to work collaboratively to form pressure groups, alliances, and coalitions and organize advocacy campaigns on national and international levels for legal reforms and implementation of laws that will further women's human rights.

B. Income
Long-term investments in women-led organizations

For Donors/Funders

• **Equitable grantmaking:** ensure grassroots women organizations receive a fair share of donor resources and philanthropic funding.

• **Expand** the mix of funding and channels for financing grassroots women organizations to build reputation, influence, advocacy, and program excellence

• **Ensure** grant processes enable collaboratives to apply and access funding: Create the conditions for collaboration and partnerships with grassroots women's organizations to succeed by incentivizing and prioritizing funding for initiatives that demonstrate women's organizations' active decision-making in project design, capacity building, project implementation, and evaluation of GBV initiatives.

• **Commit** to long-term flexible and unrestricted funding to support core administrative costs and technical and operational capacity building of local and women's organizations to strengthen their leadership in ending GBV.

• **Remove** barriers to direct financing of grassroots organizations and stringent sub-granting approval procedures to allow international agencies to partner with local organizations working to end GBV in their communities.

• **Provide** tailored funding using a high-touch approach to help build women's organizations' capabilities to strengthen/put in place operational, administrative, and financial systems to lower risk.

• **Disburse** tailored investment capital in the form of patient capital or philanthropic donations.

• **Mobilize** philanthropic funding and invest in grassroots initiatives that address systemic barriers to gender justice.

B. Income
Long-term investments in women-led organizations

For UN Agencies and International Development Community

• **Prioritize** partnerships with and facilitate access to funding for grassroots women's organizations working to end GBV in their communities.

• **Be flexible:** Employ a flexible approach that recognizes that grassroots women's organizations are at different levels of capabilities and competencies. A more flexible understanding of the potential ways of partnering and funding grassroots organizations is needed.

• **Facilitate** grassroots women's organizations' capabilities assessment as this can be an eye-opener. It gives a comprehensive picture of the organization and its needs and becomes a valuable tool for identifying areas requiring strengthening, upskilling, and mentoring. (i.e., program capability, advocacy/campaigning capability, organizational capability—operational/administrative capacities— and fundraising capability)

• **Support** partnerships with grassroots women's organizations by connecting them to highly skilled GBV technical and functional professionals and experts that share evidence and best practices/innovations to help them strengthen

systems and service delivery in real-time.

• **Recognize** the link between operational and technical needs in organizational development: Thus, support to women's organizations must consider not only GBV technical know-how but also how financial, administrative, personnel, procurement, and ICT systems must adapt to ensure adequate capabilities and the resources required to do so.

• **Promote** equitable partnership models between national/regional/international and grassroots women's organizations. As a result, women organizations at the micro and macro level better understand and build on their knowledge and response capacity and employ joint strategic decision-making in intervention design, implementation process, or outcomes.

• **Invest** in sustained capacity and institutional strengthening for grassroots women's organizations —strengthen operationally and GBV technical programming capabilities through training, ongoing mentoring, financing, and supporting prevention, mitigation, and response initiatives.

C. Innovation
Adopt evidence-backed practices/innovations in GBV programming and advocacy

• **Proactively** identify initiatives with the potential to generate broader effects and disseminate insights and practical tools to improve the effectiveness of grassroots women organizations.

• **Enhance** the capacities and funding for grassroots women's organizations to support them in adopting evidence-backed practices and services. Strengthening the operational and financial capacities should go hand-in-hand with technical ability on GBV programming, technical approaches, and advocacy.

• **Document** South-to-South development models: There are immense opportunities to work with grassroots organizations to document development models and approaches that are emerging from the South that have the potential to accelerate development practice in GBV prevention, mitigation, and response (e.g., Role Model Men).

• **Invest** in strengthening the technology and innovation expertise of women leaders and their organizations to advance their work for gender justice.

• **Increase** the capacity of grassroots women organizations to seek and use information and technologies to solve system challenges, improve their practices, and increase their reach and impact.

• **Support** grassroots women organizations to build digital capacity and leverage technology to transform how they operate and serve constituents; efficiently collect data and use it to refine their programming.

D. Identity
Reflect, develop, learn

• **Reframe** grassroots women's organizations' work, from charity/aid to human services.

• **Create** and sustain a compelling grassroots women's movement identity as a positive force across civil society

• **Empower** advocates with leadership qualities for systemic change: This includes supporting grassroots women leaders to engage relevant internal and external stakeholders, building coalitions, and building alliances and partnerships that address gender equity.

• **Support** grassroots women leaders to facilitate multi-stakeholder collaboration needed for systemic change.

• **Diversify** leadership training and capacity development for women leaders and their organizations at different places in the system. Whether they are playing new roles or improving the way they perform existing ones, there is a need to enhance understanding of how their roles fit into the system, implement them more efficiently at a technical level, and encourage individual actors to interact with each other more effectively.

E. Impact

• **Develop** new and impactful communication capabilities and engagement models, which include strengthening the capacity to advocate, communicate and collaborate with radically diverse stakeholders.

• **Apply** new models/approaches of support provision (operating, programming, funding, Engagement). In the immediate and medium-term, support to grassroots women organizations must focus on their Models/Approaches even more than on their Capabilities:

• **Adjust** focus from the more micro-projects and programs approaches to the more macro systems approaches to development. Contribute to micro and macro solutions and support root causes and systemic development issues.

• **Mobilize** long-term funding for systemic and root cause solutions—given the increasing importance of better tackling and addressing the root causes of inequalities.

• **Concentrate** equally on policy reform, operations, and programming at district and national levels.

• **Shift** from the "problem solving" paradigm – to the "solution creation" paradigm: Support mindset shift from the more traditional problem-solving approaches to the more transformational solutions approaches.

• **Develop** new engagement models. Create and establish a roadmap to move grassroots women organizations from "silos" to networks;

• **Build** the capacity of grassroots women's groups and organizations to develop self-sufficiency in mobilizing resources and fundraising in all its forms, prioritizing the ability to secure and execute grants from governments and donor agencies, and identifying new donor sources (i.e., Philanthropic, Foundations, PPPs, Multilaterals, Social Investment Capital, and Impact Bonds).

• **Reinforce** partnerships and collaborations that are effective for systems change: new partnership approaches are needed to build the long-term institutional capacity and strengthen the role of grassroots women's organizations in delivering GBV prevention and response services.

• **Pursue** partnership equity, specifically, prioritize building equal partnerships with grassroots women organizations that capitalize on the added value that grassroots women leaders and their organizations bring to the GBV space because of their experience and expertise.

2

Introduction

2.1 Background to the survey

Tallawah Justice for Women, Gulu Women Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G), partnered with the University of Nottingham School of Law and commissioned a mapping exercise and needs assessment survey of women leaders of survivor, grassroots, and community-based organizations (SGCBOs) in the conflict-affected regions of North and North-Eastern Uganda. The project's main aim was to acquire data to understand better grassroots women SGCBO leaders' lived experiences and perspectives, identify constraints and opportunities to improve their work and reflect on possible solutions in solidarity with them. A secondary goal was to provide Ugandan policymakers with crucial data to inform and support ongoing policy efforts to advance transitional justice in the region and implement national strategies to combat gender inequality and gender-based violence.

Issues of particular focus included:
• How these women leaders are working to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls through their organizations;
• The pain points and constraints that the women leaders and their organizations face affect their effectiveness and sustained impact;
• The systems and structures are required to ensure sustained support for grassroots women leaders and their organizations to advance the agenda of ending violence against women and girls.

Over 140 women survivors of violence who now lead grassroots organizations participated in the interviews or Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Participants were purposively selected as survivors of sexual violence and for their role as leaders in their communities. The interviews were based on standardized but open questions designed to give a feel for these women leaders' thoughts and reveal potential response patterns. In addition, the team administered an additional survey to 21 randomly selected participants to deepen the analysis based on feedback from the initial respondents.

In synthesizing and interpreting the qualitative findings, the research team used the internal logic and consistency in interview responses to develop narratives on how women-led organizations leverage different interventions, the varied entry points for their GBV programming, potential impacts, and implications. These narratives provide a helpful methodological and analytical framework for understanding impact pathways and greater awareness of bottlenecks that grassroots women leaders and their organizations face.

> **"Over 140 women survivors of violence who now lead grassroots organizations participated in the interviews or Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)."**

This assessment adopted a broad, collective view of grassroots women leaders' capacities, collective strengths, and constraints rather than focusing on individual entities. The assessment does not and was not designed to assess any particular initiative or set of activities, nor was the undertaking intended to be a formal evaluation. Instead, this assessment sought to help the research team develop a more general picture of the context and potential pathways for relevant interventions to strengthen or reinforce the work of grassroots women leaders and their organizations.

The analytical frameworks used throughout this report invite readers to reflect on pathways and processes that propel change, ask questions such as "how might change happen," and deepen their understanding of the critical levers that might propel change. The analytical approaches also highlight change processes and potential change mechanisms and clarify connections between diverse variables of interest. As a result, the findings and evaluations present a solid base for analyzing what corrective steps need to be taken.

Throughout this document, we set the scene for ongoing reflection with a series of quotes from the respondents interviewed. The quotes illustrate, for example, how grassroots women organizations, through various initiatives, are working to prevent violence against women and children. Beyond deepening our understanding of the critical levers that determine the effectiveness of grassroots women organizations, we also reflect on the value grassroots women leaders place on different issues.

2.1.1 Contextual overview

The 20-year insurgency by the rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and Ugandan government forces practically decimated Northern and North-Eastern Uganda. The protracted conflict, characterized by abductions, sexual and gender-based violence, familial displacement, and land-grabbing, contributed to significant economic, social and cultural deprivation and displacement of the affected populations.

Significant effort has been made through developmental projects and reconstruction initiatives to address the economic, social, and infrastructural gaps faced by survivors and residents of the post-conflict regions. Through diverse infrastructural development ventures and poverty reduction programs, the Ugandan Government has worked to make significant changes to the physical, economic, and social landscape of the region. In addition, the Government has made significant strides in improving maternal, newborn, and child health indicators and boosting access to essential services, including expansion of primary and secondary education, improvements in water and sanitation services, and access to critical health care.

Despite this apparent progress, communities in the conflict-affected areas continue to face innumerable struggles, including high poverty levels due to fragile livelihoods and unemployment, inequalities in access to essential services; weak social protection systems; and a lack of services to support families and institutions to meet specialized needs. Moreover, the projected economic growth at the national level has yet to translate into tangible human development outcomes in these regions. As a result, human development indicators, including education, health, gender equality, and women's sexual and reproductive health, lag behind the rest of the country.

> **"Significant effort has been made through developmental projects and reconstruction initiatives to address the economic, social, and infrastructural gaps faced by survivors and residents of the post-conflict regions."**

With the end of the conflict, many families returned home to disputes over land and property. Land-related issues, including access, ownership, and use, are among the main drivers of vulnerability in conflict-affected communities. These are exacerbated by climatic shocks such as unpredictable weather patterns which affect farm production levels, limited access to markets, and inadequate access and connectivity to infrastructure. In addition, the socio-economic and emotional stressors- worsened by the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic-are magnified for already vulnerable post-conflict communities because of insecure livelihoods and limited access to essential social services and safety nets. Moreover, the situation is worsened by unreliable relief efforts and post-pandemic recovery measures.

2.1.2 Gender inequalities and SGBV

The conflict contributed to and exacerbated deeply gendered inequalities in the social fabric of the affected communities. Many women and girls continue to suffer from the trauma and psychological impact of the conflict. There are signs of recurring cycles of high levels of SGBV within the family and the broader community. These persistent incidents of violence and the attendant stigma continue to affect women's productivity and social and economic advancement at the household and community levels.

While the severity and prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) differ between the regions, safeguarding women and girls against SGBV, context-specific risk and vulnerabilities emerged as a specific post-conflict issue. Nationwide, the lifetime prevalence of GBV in Uganda is estimated at 49.9%, suggesting that violence against women is rampant. This statistic is well above the average in Africa and globally. (Global Gender Gap & Report, 2020)

Apart from the conflict, the lives of women and girls in the conflict-affected regions are still primarily shaped by gendered social norms and religious customs instead of constitutional rights, which further entrench existing inequities and contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls. For example, women's decision-making concerning their health care needs, particularly reproductive health, is still very low, resulting in large families, on average, with eight children. Conservative socio-cultural norms sustain vulnerability by curtailing girls' ability to make informed decisions, particularly about sex and contraception. They are one of the drivers of high teenage pregnancy rates in these communities. The low literacy rates and high poverty levels continue to have a detrimental impact on women's

ability and confidence to take on leadership responsibilities and further limit their ability to participate fully and benefit from development in the post-conflict regions. Women in these areas have limited access to, and ownership of productive resources (especially land), limited skills and access to resources and information, and gender and social inequities exacerbate their struggle to lift themselves and their children out of poverty.

This social and economic context generates enormous gaps and diminishes women's well-being emotionally, physically, mentally, socially, and civically.

> **"Many women and girls continue to suffer from the trauma and psychological impact of the conflict."**

For men, the war undermined the traditional male identity crafted around men's ability to protect and provide for their families. In addition, living in internally displaced people (IDPs) camps left men and youth with limited skills, low income, and prospects to conform to societal expectations. As a result, many men have difficulty regaining their former livelihoods and are less able to fend for their families as traditionally expected. Poverty and changes in socioeconomic conditions have all combined to undermine dominant ideas of masculinity and erode traditional roles of men as providers/ breadwinners. Some men consequently resort to reaffirming their masculinity negatively— extramarital affairs, domestic violence, and alcohol misuse.

2.1.3 Laws and policies to address violence against women

However, advancements in laws and policies addressing violence against women have created a progressive framework through which women in the region can, in principle, claim their rights to live non-violent lives, be free from deprivation and marginalization, and have access to livelihood opportunities.

The government of Uganda, in collaboration with key development partners, including relevant United Nations (UN) and other multilateral agencies and international donors, has made significant strides in advancing women's human rights and gender equality, including through enacting laws and policies to eliminate SGBV and harmful practices of child marriage and female genital mutilation.

The national GBV Task Force and the GBV Secretariat within the Ministry of Gender and Development are mandated to advance the National Policy on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence and the National Action Plan III on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP III) which include specific targets concerning engagement with CBOs and survivors of SGBV. The National Transitional Justice Policy developed to provide avenues for justice and reparations for the survivors of the conflict also includes a specific focus on and attention to SGBV victims.

In addition, with support from various development partners and international donors such as the United States Agency for International Development, law enforcement officials, health professionals, and other actors have received training to manage SGBV cases and document and report clinical evidence.

Additionally, outreach strategies and psycho-social services have been set up for the care of survivors. Sensitization has had some positive results with increased opportunities for women, removal of barriers to women's access to health, legal and social services, and better appreciation of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Unfortunately, there is still a glaring gap between policy and practice. Many policies and plans still need to be turned into real gains, particularly for girls, and women, who suffer from profoundly entrenched gender inequalities and vulnerabilities across the different economic, political, social, and cultural domains. In addition, while the positive impacts of existing programs and investments can be observed, many initiatives are often limited in scope and geographical coverage.

> **"The National Transitional Justice Policy developed to provide avenues for justice and reparations for the survivors of the conflict also includes a specific focus on and attention to SGBV victims."**

2.1.3 Laws and policies to address violence against women *(contd.)*

Despite government commitment to strengthening the country's protection system by prioritizing concrete measures to end violence, the sector struggles to attract meaningful and sustained political commitment.

This lack of commitment translates into inadequate resources and public funding to translate policies into benefits. As a result, the sector is constantly fighting against cuts to public budgets, or at best, is fighting to protect level funding, which translates into reductions over time as costs rise.

In a context of "competing priorities," when public funding is short, the first programs to be cut are those targeting preventing violence against women and girls. For example, an assessment on financing for SGBV supported by UN WOMEN under the Spotlight Initiative revealed that the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development is chronically underfunded.

Additionally, the proportion of the budget allocated to violence against women and girls for the relevant Ministerial Departments, Agencies, and Local Governments is below 5%. The absence of sustained philanthropic funding also stalls many progressive initiatives.

Philanthropic funding would support efforts to address the root cause of GBV, which necessitates a more strategic, long-term approach than project funding usually allows. Advancing broader women's rights and gender justice calls for significant changes to how public policy, programs, and support services are structured, funded, and implemented.

> **"In a context of "competing priorities," when public funding is short, the first programs to be cut are those targeting preventing violence against women and girls."**

2.1.4 Structure of the report

The report is organized into six chapters:

Chapter 1 Executive Summary	Provides a summary of the issues addressed in the report, the findings, and recommendations.
Chapter 2 Introduction	Provides an introduction to the evaluation and the contextual framework for analyzing the findings. This chapter also provides background information on the SGBV issues in post-conflict communities and briefly explores the political and socio-cultural contexts within which SGBV programming happens.
Chapter 3 Survey Findings and Analysis	Summarizes the findings and analysis of the evaluation and survey of grassroots women leaders, their perspectives, efforts, and challenges they face to address SGBV.
Chapter 4 The Impact of Grassroots Women's Organizations on SGBV Prevention	This Chapter sets out to better understand the GBV prevention issues grassroots women organizations respond to, the typical response pathways they follow, and the extent to which the outcomes are favorable. To help situate the work of grassroots women organizations, we use the analogy of a river— "upstream, midstream, and downstream framework"— often cited to illustrate the actual/probable impacts or effectiveness of these interventions.
Chapter 5 Factors affecting the impact of Grassroots Women's Organization's impact on GBV	Highlights the factors affecting the impact of grassroots women organizations on SGBV. The research team utilizes the Three Circle Model as a lens to assess grassroots women organizations and draw conclusions on what is required to strengthen or reinforce their work. By looking at the interaction between the core functional areas, we can understand the potential impact and, alternatively, the constraints to impact. The Three Circle Model calls for a consideration of three functional areas that have a bearing on an organization's ability to accomplish its mission, to be resilient, and be sustainable, namely: knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward programmatic issues ("to do"); essential internal systems and structures ("to be"); and valuable positive external relationships with influential actors or critical power brokers who can deliver sustained and scalable impact ("to relate").
Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations	Sets out the implications for different stakeholders, including the women leaders themselves, in engaging with grassroots women leaders and their organisations. We also make detailed recommendations to strengthen the role of women's organizations in delivering GBV prevention and response services across five pathways: (i.e., Influence, Income, Impact, Innovation, and Identity).

3

Survey Findings and Analysis
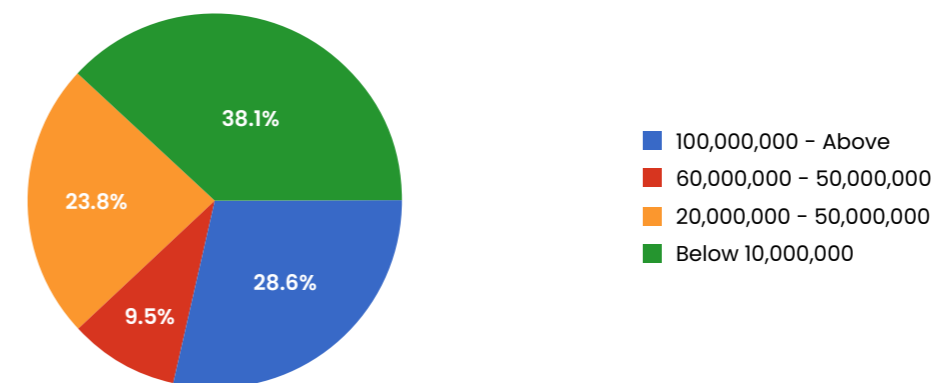
3.1 The Target Group

The target group of this research was women leaders of grassroots, survivor, and community-based organizations in the districts of Gulu, Pader, Kitgum, Lamwo, Amuru, and Nwoya Moroto, Soroti, Lira, Arua, and Adjumani in North and North-Eastern Uganda.

We defined grassroots women organizations as service-oriented organizations led by women who work to improve the lives of individuals or groups within their communities or bring attention to specific issues. These organizations are often structurally small and operate with limited budgets (estimated average annual budgets below $5000 per year). We also considered grassroots organizations to include common interest groups which come together to achieve a common purpose. Women organically come together motivated by the need to meet
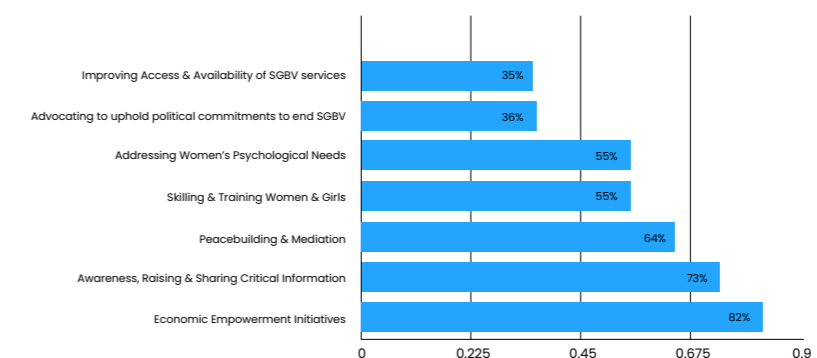
a collective goal which is often the desire and willingness to change their situation. They are often direct beneficiaries of the social change themselves.

As this report will demonstrate, grassroots women's organizations play a crucial role in times of crisis. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic—lockdowns and restrictions saw a surge in violence against women and girls, and grassroots women-led organizations were among the first responders who could directly address the urgent needs of their constituents. However, our research confirmed that grassroots women leaders and their organizations face critical constraints in their programming, funding, and operations, making it increasingly difficult for them to sustain viable operations.

Average annual income of Grassroots Women Organisations

- ■ 100,000,000 - Above
- ■ 60,000,000 - 50,000,000
- ■ 20,000,000 - 50,000,000
- ■ Below 10,000,000

38.1%
28.6%
23.8%
9.5%

Ways Grassroots Womens Organisations are tackling SGBV

Category	%
Improving Access & Availability of SGBV services	35%
Advocating to uphold political commitments to end SGBV	36%
Addressing Women's Psychological Needs	55%
Skilling & Training Women & Girls	55%
Peacebuilding & Mediation	64%
Awareness, Raising & Sharing Critical Information	73%
Economic Empowerment Initiatives	82%

3.2 Economic Empowerment

Our survey found that 82% of grassroots women interviewed indicated involvement or support of economic empowerment projects targeting women. They help women facing specific vulnerabilities to pursue concrete alternative livelihood opportunities through skill training, informal money lending services through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), and micro-enterprise development as a source of income and protection.

Many grassroots initiatives prioritize vocational skills training as it empowers women in positive ways to develop self-confidence and visualize an alternative pathway that enables them to live a dignified life. Additionally, vocational skills training is geared towards nurturing a spirit of enterprise, self-reliance, and a sense of agency among women and encouraging participation in micro-enterprises. The entrepreneurial skills attained are expected to boost business acumen to help women transition to safe work and obtain decent livelihoods. In addition, grassroots women leaders, through their organizations, help women, girls, and GBV survivors to build social assets and develop social capital by assisting them in organizing self-help groups and collectives. These collectives provide a safe space

for women to talk, share survival strategies, boost women's self-esteem, and support each other financially through informal money lending and group farming initiatives.

These initiatives, which ensure that women and GBV survivors control productive assets and develop economically viable livelihoods, are a powerful violence prevention strategy that helps reduce poverty among women survivors, thereby lessening their vulnerability to violence. Given the increased vulnerability of economically marginalized women and girls to sexual coercion, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence, facilitating economic independence for women contributes to greater independence and decision-making in the home, which leads to more balanced household relationships and a decline in violence against women. In addition, this shifts the gendered power relations in households and communities as men develop an appreciation for women because of the benefit of additional income for the entire family. Improving women's ability to earn a sustainable income can thus positively impact familial power dynamics and resource distribution without resulting in social or cultural opprobrium.

"We train women and girls in different skills like tailoring; we have also helped them open up VSLAs to save and borrow money to kickstart different income-generating activities,"

Women survivor leader Lira district

"We encourage women to join savings groups where they can get loans at meager interest rates. They can use this money to hire or buy land to use as a group or as individuals to do some farming for sale and use this income to educate their children. They can also use this money to meet other basic needs",

Women's survivor group leader, Amuria district.

"We economically support the survivors, strengthen them to enable them to make independent decisions in life. We focus on economic empowerment. For example, some WAW board members buy materials and pay tuition for these women to do vocational courses such as hairdressing, baking, and tailoring, which gives them social and financial capital",

Leader of Women in Action for Women (WAW), Gulu.

"We need skilling opportunities for women and the girls who drop out of school like tailoring, catering, and weaving to get some income and help their families rather than depending on only men—it is causing much domestic violence in many families. For example, a man in our community asked his wife whether he had four hands, and the wife had two hands when she asked for money from him",

KII with former abductee leader, Adjumani women's VSLA.

3.3 Awareness-Raising and information dissemination

Grassroots women leaders and women's organizations play a critical role in building violence prevention and response systems in conflict-affected communities in Uganda. These include leading community-wide awareness-raising on GBV prevention, educating women and girls on protection strategies, and conducting outreach to disseminate critical information about available services and programs.

73% of respondents indicated that they are involved in human rights awareness-raising and work to ensure that critical information is communicated and disseminated to the broader community. The women often go from village to village, holding awareness sessions about domestic violence, gender equity, and women's rights targeting women and communities. Sensitization activities revolve around domestic violence to help communities understand and challenge the gendered social norms perpetuating SGBV. Activities include mobilizing communities to break the silence around SGBV, promoting dialogue and challenging the acceptance of violence, and building social support for women who experience violence in families and the community.

"We educate communities on women's rights, including SGBV, to stand out, speak for themselves, and support their fellow women who could not have gotten this training. In addition, we advocate for women's empowerment and participation in policy-making conferences at whatever level; we have been doing this since 2002 such that their views are also captured and considered.

FGD participant Lira district.

"Sensitization and advocacy of women and girl child about their rights; Encouraging the female dropouts so that they go back to school; Providing skilling opportunities to the dropouts especially in hairdressing to make them independent and have an income-generating activity. Moreover, in case of rape, killing, or sexual harassment, we make follow-up referrals of the victim to the rightful authority, especially the health facilities, police, or even courts of law, depending on the magnitude of the offense"

KII with Agnes in Gulu district.

"We sensitize communities on the dangers of early girl child marriages in the whole of Lango sub-region. In addition, we conduct school sensitization on girl child education liaising with the school administration and education departments in the different districts in Lango",

FGD participant, LFCLA, Lira.

"FGM is now reduced and not openly practiced like before,"

FGD participant KAWUO, Moroto.

Women now know their rights, and they always speak out; for instance, one woman confessed to me that her husband once wanted to sell their rice alone without involving her, but because she knew her rights, she made an alarm and sought help from other women. As a result, he didn't sell the rice but came to an agreement, and they sold it as husband and wife",

FGD participant, Amuru district.

3.4 Advocacy for political or social change

36% of respondents interviewed engage in advocacy for political or social change. However, any changes in policies and administrative environments that have resulted from advocacy efforts were not well articulated. This assessment noted that grassroots women organizations have generally aligned themselves with government policies rather than addressing shortfalls.

While a few reported engaging in advocacy activities on policy issues, the extent to which these initiatives' outcomes have led to policy change is less clear. There is no indication that the initiatives of the women leaders seek to address or challenge the root causes of social and economic disparities — including lack of employment opportunities, lack of health facilities, and weak social protection systems. So far, the focus of most of the activities undertaken has been on improving access through service provision, with less emphasis on addressing social determinants and policy/structural barriers.

"We once helped a widow claim back the property taken away from her by the husband's relatives after his death. She reported the matter to us because she was aware of her rights, and we alerted the respective authorities. As a result, we were able to intervene and helped to reclaim all her lost properties",

KII with the leader of KAWUO, Moroto district

"Another scenario was an orphan— a young girl who was repeatedly sexually abused by her caregiver. He was taking advantage of her vulnerability as an orphan—totally dependent on him. But one day, she ran to our organization for help, and we registered the case with the police. The victim was arrested and prosecuted,"

FGD participant Lira.

"To a great extent, men have stopped violating women's and girls' rights, which has been so because of the naming and shaming approach we use in the open air. But, on the negative side, they also look at us as women who have spoiled their marriages and wives, so most keep throwing insults at us when we pass by them,"

FGD participant, Kitgum district

"We encourage women to participate in public occasions like women's day celebrations, human rights activism, and environmental interventions to make women learn measures to ensure that they do not deplete their environment for the next generations to come. We also train them to make energy-saving stoves that they can sell to earn some income",

Women survivor leader, Gulu District

"We hold mass community campaigns where we educate women on how to speak out about their rights, break the silence around SGBV, and advocacy activities like the 16 days of activism. In addition, we are sometimes facilitated to participate in budgeting conferences where women's needs are captured and budgeted for,"

Women survivor leader, KOWDO.

"Our governance project started in 2021. In this project, we amplify women's voices in decision-making processes, awareness creation, training, lobbying, and advocacy,"

KII with the leader of KAWUO

"We have participated in Radio Talk shows facilitated by Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP). We decided not to put our thoughts on men but work hard to get money. We have been doing this for eight years, but due to COVID-19, our activities have stalled. So now we don't have radio talk time "dwan wa ma wabedo ka cwalo ne I radio omini wa keru" "Our voices on the radio gave us power." But since I am the mobilizer for Holy Rosary Ward in my village, if the LC chairperson gathers the community members, I always say a word about ending violence against women and girls,"

KII with the Leader Kica pa Rwot women's group, Gulu.

3.5 Conflict resolution, mediation, and peacebuilding

Many grassroots women leaders are trusted community leaders in whom women, girls, and GBV survivors can confide their experiences and personal challenges, from domestic issues to gendered violence. In addition, they are often at the forefront of supporting women and their families to resolve domestic conflicts as trusted mediators.

64% of those interviewed participate in peacebuilding and mediation activities involving resolving domestic violence incidents. They work directly with families, strengthening relationships between families and neighbors.

"We are engaged in peace and security work where we train women survivors in the greater North. We have focal persons in Arua, Adjumani, Moroto, Nwoya, Gulu, Lamwo, Lira, Soroti, Katakwi, and Kiryandongo. These focal point persons are also survivor leaders who lead women in these areas, "

KII with the leader of Women in Action for Women (WAW), Gulu.

"As a community mobilizer, people appreciate my work, but as a former abductee, I have no home. Sometimes, we are chased away from the house on issues related to 'children's simple fights' if your child fights with another child, the whole village mobilizes to chase us away. Still, the deeper issue is that we were abducted and returned with unwanted children from the bush. Therefore, if we could be supported with buying land even in other villages, we are willing to resettle anywhere",

KII with Leader Kica pa Rwot women's group, Gulu.

3.6 Training and capacity-building initiatives

55% of the grassroots organizations surveyed offer training and capacity-building initiatives for women survivors of GBV. Discussions with respondents underline the extent to which grassroots women leaders value training and capacity development and the prospect of training as an incentive to improve their work.

Some grassroots organizations train men as peer trainers to sensitize their peers about gender issues and challenge gender inequality. As a result, such peer trainers significantly influence how other men behave, transform sociocultural attitudes, prejudices, and norms regarding the status of women, reduce gender-based violence and stimulate behavioral change.

Others are harnessing the potential for family-strengthening interventions to reduce the incidence of violence against women. They support women with practical strategies to improve family well-being, particularly food security, hygiene and disease control, household livelihoods, education, and social networks. They also support women in developing and applying practical decision-making strategies at home and standing up to the violence in their daily lives.

"In Karamoja, women have a limited say in the decisions that affect them; hence the need was to empower them. We train male champions and elders who are role models to the community so they can go back and talk to the household experiencing GBV. We also train the communities on the dangers of FGM, especially in the Tapac sub-county; The young girls are linked to sponsors such as BRAC so that they are educated,"

KII with the leader of KAWUO.

"We hold fundraising workshops for women's handmade products, and some of the membership fees we, as women, give in annually are given to women as start-up capital. These have kept them busy and hence fighting poverty. In addition, as volunteers, we counsel most GBV victims who come to our concern by educating them on their women's rights. We also refer cases to other NGOs,"

FGD participant KOWDO, Soroti.

"The training and support we give to women's groups has enabled women to own resources and engage in income-generating activities. Because of empowering women, today, we women are engaged in decision-making in their homes. We are now making decisions together, put aside some money for school fees, and most can send their children to school,"

FGD participant KAWUO, Moroto.

"We need capacity-building opportunities—our staff trained on GBV issues, women's rights, HIV/AIDS prevention, Sexual and Reproductive rights to handle different GBV issues effectively,"

KII with a women survivor leader from Katakwi district.

3.7 Psychosocial and Social Support

55% of women-led organizations offer psychosocial support services, including trauma management, personal development, and practical psychosocial support to encourage women to overcome their lack of literacy and overcome their trauma. 35% of the grassroots organizations offer direct support to SGBV victims, including providing them with critical information, referrals to HIV treatment clinics, and social support services. They also sensitize communities about the importance and benefits of reporting SGBV. Many organizations partnered with themselves or other key actors to increase access and availability of SGBV services. Despite their efforts, the number of persons who continue to suffer from psychological trauma and other medical and social impacts of the protracted conflict requires more systematic policies and interventions to fully address this issue in the conflict-affected communities.

"We routinely organize sensitization campaigns about HIV/AIDS to the public, and we mainly target women who are sometimes silent victims. We also hold radio talk shows and tell people our doors are open. We get so many people coming to our office and opening up as we assure them of confidentiality from these talk shows. In addition, we use campaign drives to create awareness in the general community about HIV/AIDS and the vigilance they need to take to keep safe. We also make home visits to continue counseling, especially to the new HIV-positive cases that get discouraged and stop taking their ARVs due to the depression and frustration",

KII with the leader of NACWOLA, Arua

"As a result of our work, more women are now empowered; most of them can now stand up and speak about their HIV status freely in public which has helped win many SGBV victims to open up and come out to ascertain their HIV/AIDS status. However, on the negative side, all the staff working for the organization have also been called people living with HIV/AIDS, yet some are not HIV positive. Still, because some staff openly speak about their HIV status, the community members have concluded that all our workers are HIV positive, which is not true",

FGD participant NACWOLA," Arua district.

"The government and the parliament of Uganda should enact and operationalize more enabling laws and policies. For instance, the dormant marriage and divorce bill, the GBV policy, Transitional Justice Policy, and the National Action Plan III on Women; these laws policies will go a long way to empower women and undoubtedly reduce the levels of SGBV,"

KII with the leader of Kolir Women Development Organization, Soroti

"Networking/partnering with other CSOs, especially with strong minds, we use their platform to support the mental issues, and these have saved us high costs of hiring such services at a very high fee, yet partnering gives it to us free of charge. Strong Minds gives us the support on mental care since they have the experience, so we normally refer victims to them. MIFUMI provides sexual and reproductive health packages and shelter for women survivors of SGBV. Action Aid Uganda supports us with capacity building, especially the training on GBV and HIV/AIDS,"

KII with the leader of Kampala Orphans & Women Development Organization, Soroti.

"We partner with Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI), which provides us with the funds to run our organization's HIV/AIDS activities. AIDS Information Center and TASO help provide voluntary counseling and testing services; they also provide medications to the women victims of SGBV,"

FGD participant in NACWOLA, Arua.

"We co-partner and network with partners like African Youth Initiative Network who help do the surgeries for the violence victims. The National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders takes the case to the police if the woman still feels threatened or is in danger. Health and Rights Initiatives helps protect critical populations (LGBTQs) from violence in the community, "

FGD participant, Lira district.

"We partner with FIDA Uganda; this organization helps us handle legal cases and go to the community to raise awareness. MIFUMI mainly provides shelter for victims of SGBV. In addition, government entities like the police, probation officers, and Community Development Officers help manage cases of child trafficking. When a case is reported, the police provide security and rescue victims,"

KII with Karamoja Women Umbrella Organization leader.

3.8 Perceptions of Leadership

From the interviews and FGDs, it was clear that respondents typically viewed leadership through the lens of the traditional model of heroic leader (politicians/ elected officials)— where the focus is on the individual at the center of leading change—the doer. This mindset does not equip individuals or women groups with the qualities and conditions needed to affect change in complex and interconnected systems in which they operate. Leadership is no longer about one person or organization at the center; instead, what is required is building a shared vision or a shared purpose as a unifying and driving force. Structural change will require leadership that is adaptive and dynamic. Different contexts may require various forms of leadership. For example, it may require women to lead the group from behind as facilitators. Sometimes, it might call for a particular individual to step forward for the collective because they have the competence or skill to decide or guide a process. In other instances, it may also require distributed action and decision-making — that is self-organized by the group. These different roles require different mindsets, different capacities, and different skills.

Respondents observed that women are significantly underrepresented in politics— while representation may have translated to a more substantial presence, it has not necessarily resulted in more active participation in decision-making. For example, interviews with women survivor leaders indicate that charging unreasonably high nomination fees for parliamentary aspirants has dramatically reduced the number of women vying for parliamentary seats. Further still, most women have previously refrained from actively participating in the political process due to the prohibitive cost of running for elective office. Moreover, women MPs generally have a more significant constituency (close to 15-20 sub-counties) than those vying for the general constituency seat (1-5 sub-counties). This implies that women spend colossal sums of money during parliamentary campaigns. Despite this, there has been an increase in the nomination fee to 3,000,000 Uganda shillings, up from 200,000 Uganda shillings for MPs starting from the 2016 general elections.

"We want to see a leveled playing field so that even those women who don't have money to buy the votes can genuinely pull the crowds and take the wins at the end of the day,"

KII, with the founder of the Center for Women and Children's Re-integration, Lira.

"It's clear that there is a need for the women survivor-led organizations to reposition themselves about the projects they are running; they should re-strategize, taking cognizance of what is happening in the donor community, feminist movement, and their own country. Most grassroots organizations are waiting to be invited to meetings and strategic events; they must begin to self-invite themselves and master boldness to enter spaces they are currently excluded from; entering these spaces will enable their voices to be heard by those who are influential enough to act."

Key Informant Gulu

"These days, elections have been heavily monetized; lack of money eliminates most women. So even if you do something extraordinary and have all the qualities of a good leader, they will not elect you without money; therefore, ensuring women's access to campaign financing for women leaders would go a long way in encouraging political participation."

KII with former abductee leader, Adjumani women's VSLA.

4

The research team utilized the "upstream, midstream, and downstream frameworks" to aggregate the views and responses of respondents to infer and explain the perceived and potential impact and effectiveness of grassroots women organizations' SGBV interventions and activities.

The Impact of Grassroots Women's Organizations on SGBV Prevention

UPSTREAM	MID-STREAM	DOWN-STREAM
Upstream interventions and strategies on the causal agents and determinants of social problems. Thier main focus inon improving fundamental social and economic structures. Policy formation, and prioritization, budget allocation and influence on strategy.	Mid-stream interventions and strategies focus on helping people cope with and improve their ability to deal with poor social conditions and immediate threats to their and their family/ community wellbieng.	Focus on deploying tactical interventions, projects and campaigns aimed at influencing specific behaviours related to social challengers such as smoking, over eating, poor energy use, etc.

Figure 10: Framework for Assessing grassroots women organizations' GBV Activities and interventions

The upstream, midstream, and downstream frameworks provide insights into core entry points for intervening in SGBV and clarify how interventions might need to change to achieve the desired outcomes. These three dimensions of the strategies for sustainability framework are interrelated regarding how change happens and what makes change possible. The framework further allows us to incorporate pathway response analysis to understand better the kind of GBV prevention issues grassroots women organizations respond to, the typical response pathway they would follow, and the extent to which the outcomes are favorable.

To help situate the work of grassroots women organizations, we use the analogy of a river— upstream, midstream, and downstream— often cited to illustrate the actual/potential impacts or effectiveness of interventions. Imagine you are the mayor of a town near a swimming hole used by children and adults. After some time, you learn that citizens develop severe and persistent rashes after swimming due to a chemical irritant in the river. You decide to take action. If you approach the company upstream that discharges the chemical into the

river and makes it stop, you are engaging in primary prevention. You are removing the hazardous exposure and preventing rashes in the first place. If you ask lifeguards to check swimmers as they get out of the river to look for signs of a rash that can be treated immediately, you are engaging in secondary prevention. You are not preventing rashes, but you are reducing their impact by treating them early on so swimmers can regain their health and go about their everyday lives as soon as possible. You engage in tertiary prevention if you set up programs and support groups that teach people how to live with their persistent rashes.

You are not preventing rashes or dealing with them right away, but you are softening their impact by helping people live with their rashes as best as possible. Upstream solutions are often, if not always, more effective (and therefore more efficient). They tend to get to the heart of the problem. But in most instances, action at all levels is needed in any comprehensive approach to intervention delivery. And these three levels are interrelated when it comes to how change happens and what makes change possible. (Source)

4.1 Findings and Analysis

4.1.1 Current programming of grassroots organizations is skewed towards downstream and midstream interventions

Most grassroots women organizations generally engage in secondary and tertiary prevention through downstream and midstream interventions. These include preventing violence against women—community-wide awareness-raising to prevent GBV; educating women and girls on how to protect themselves; providing psychosocial support to survivors; mediating in domestic conflicts; referring and reporting cases of SGBV to police, and pushing for legal action if needed.

The downstream interventions attempt to change the effects of the causes in one way or another. The focus is on deploying tactical interventions, projects, and information campaigns to influence specific behaviors related to GBV. At the same time, midstream interventions seek to help women cope with and improve their ability to deal with poor social conditions and immediate threats to their livelihood. Projects aim to foster self-reliance and empower women facing specific vulnerabilities to pursue alternative livelihood opportunities through skilling, informal money lending services through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), and micro-enterprise development as a source of income and protection.

Downstream and midstream initiatives mainly constitute service delivery projects that focus on the lack of information and access to support services. Due to the limited funding available to grassroots women organizations, less attention is dedicated to some crucial aspects of gender relations, including consideration of other drivers of GBV or the broader context, mainly social and gender norms. While some of the projects do build men's capacities for behavioral change and sensitize men as strategies to address practical gender needs, for the most part, they still work within the existing gender relations, division of resources, and responsibilities.

Balance Focus on women's agency with Structural Change

Grassroots women interventions comprise economic empowerment strategies with a common thread running through all of them—fostering women's agency and self-reliance and—the capacity of a woman as an individual to act independently and make her own free choices. However, the focus is predominantly on individual behaviors and attributes: the emphasis is placed on women and girls changing or modifying their behavior instead of looking at the broader power dynamics in the setting. We have yet to achieve a balance between focusing on agency and structural change in working to strengthen gender programming at the grassroots.

Nearly all activities by grassroots women organizations typically focus on women's practical gender needs that are immediate and critical to survival without necessarily tackling the challenge of changing women's positions. Upstream interventions that address the causal agents, determinants, and inequities in the systems and social and economic structures that underlie the GBV are generally underrepresented in current programming.

Women-led organizations must move towards more transformational strategies and interventions that address strategic gender interests like decision-making power, ownership, and representation. Strategic and practical needs go hand in hand, and both need to be considered in a given intervention. Upstream interventions would support transformation in policies, practices, power dynamics, discriminatory social norms, or beliefs and attitudes, leading to a more profound and sustained impact and reducing GBV in the communities.

We cannot attain true empowerment of women by solely focusing on agency; we need to add the dimensions of structural change with the explicit intention of expanding or sustaining change for women. This dual focus on agency and structural change in interventions can be catalytic — because changes in one affect the other. When progress is made on both fronts, the impact is much more profound than is possible through a singular focus on improvements in either alone. Singularly focusing only on agency assumes, for example, that if we empower women with information about their rights, skill them and build their capacities, women will freely choose to use them without considering constraints that might make it harder for women to transform their capabilities and skills into income or well-being. Structural constraints (e.g., cultural norms, laws, and regulations) may limit women's opportunities.

Similarly, a singular focus on structural conditions alone assumes, for example, that implemented laws will translate into equal opportunity and that women will automatically benefit, which is not always the case. Therefore, while currently there is a skewed focus on agency, we should not lose sight of the interaction between the two. Examining the interactions between structure and agency can be a helpful way to begin to understand the impact of structural constraints (customs, habits, and traditions) on individual behavior and vice versa.

Ways Grassroots Women Organizations are tackling SGBV
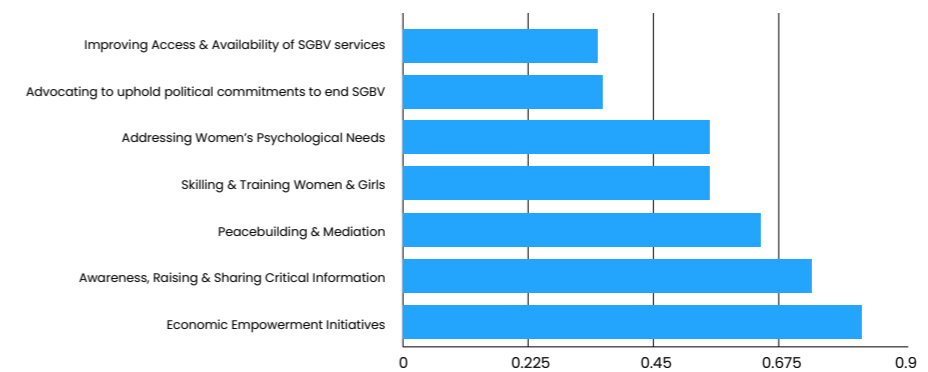
Source & Mix of Revenue for Grassroots Womens Organizations
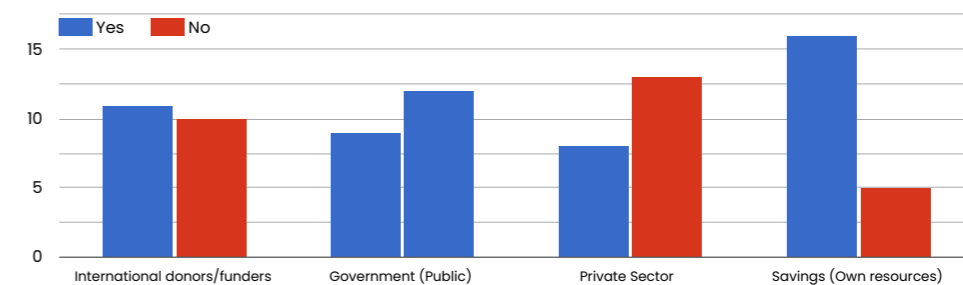
4.1.2 Build on bottom-up social norm change

While most projects are short-term and do not run long enough to see any meaningful impact on the transformation of gender norms, they provide valuable lessons about the nature of gender norms as a driver of GBV. For example, respondents reported observing more progressive attitudes and behaviors towards women and gender in the communities they work in, which they are building on. A long history of awareness-raising and sensitization has therefore had some positive impact. It has resulted in more opportunities for women, removing barriers to women's access to services, and better appreciation of SGBV. Some respondents also spoke of a shift in the value placed on girls: that parents were more aware of the importance of girls' education and were consequently keener to keep girls in school. Still, parents/caregivers are financially constrained— unable to afford school fees, thus hindering girls' ability to complete formal schooling.

Some respondents also noted that communities speak out about gender-based violence and publicly support survivors as first responders, breaking with the normative societal belief that domestic violence is a private family matter, a 'women's issue.' As a result, communities are more willing to act and intervene in domestic violence cases. With this existing recognition within their communities that gender inequality and specific social and gender norms are problematic, there is a need to act to change those norms. This broad awareness of these problems provides a critical entry point to getting communities to see the importance of efforts to shift gender norms and discuss how to support them to make a change.

Herein lies the value of the grassroots women leader. Bottom-up norm change will require working with individuals within family settings and groups to help them recognize that some norms are problematic and act to change them. Additionally, addressing gender inequalities and transforming gender norms involves working with a range of actors in the community who can influence niche outcomes beyond women and girls. Her central role in the community as a confidant and advocate is key to building and sustaining these collective norm changes from the bottom up. Finally, bottom-up norm change is structural and will require long-term, consistent engagement working with the same target populations over a long period.

4.1.3 Focus on whole family approaches and allyship building

A skewed focus on women as "individuals," among other challenges, creates the belief that the work of grassroots women organizations benefits just a subgroup of vulnerable people rather than understanding the collective benefit from equitable gender relations. In a context where gender discrimination is deeply entrenched, whole family approaches, grounded in community values, can contribute to positive outcomes, in addition to a focus on the contributions of women and girls. Thus, there is a need to support grassroots organizations in implementing empowerment strategies that can lead to gender-equal outcomes that allow men and women to benefit equally.

A Whole Family Approach

An entire family approach is built on the premise that conditions that affect the family directly bear on women's experiences. Moreover, what is good for the family is good for women. We see this in the family-strengthening interventions currently being implemented, albeit on a small scale. Creating stability for the family requires focusing on the whole, particularly more balanced household relationships and promoting men's involvement in families. An entire family approach entails working directly with families to support the adoption of norms and practices among households that respond to strategic gender interests from a more equitable gender division of labor and alleviating the burden of domestic work; shared control and ownership of resources, and decision-making to improve family functioning and reduce the risk of GBV.

Some grassroots women organizations have worked with men as agents to help change gender attitudes and deeply entrenched ideas of masculinity and to prevent violence.

For example, some projects use gender accommodating strategies that engage men in their roles as husbands, partners, and community members. This is crucial as, to truly advance gender equity, there is a continuous need for program interventions that work with boys and men to question established norms, build their capacities to modify their behavior, and help them become gender-sensitive.

Stakeholders and donors should support grassroots women in implementing gender-transformative programs that use social and behavioral change communication strategies to target men, encouraging them to reflect and question established notions of masculinity that perpetuate discrimination and violence, social norms, and traditional gender roles, and relationships that may have adverse effects.

Role modeling:

Working with men as allies to prevent violence, shift gender attitudes and notions of masculinity

Some grassroots organizations identify and work with positive deviants- "Role Model Men" who do things differently from the norm. Positive deviants demonstrate uncommon successful practices, behaviors, and strategies, making them visible to others to encourage norm change. "Role Model Men" are an example of these positive deviants. An essential part of these interventions consists of recruiting and training men in targeted communities and supporting them to become role models demonstrating the qualities and desired behaviors of men who prioritize the welfare of their households. The interventions then leverage the participation of Role Model Men in ongoing activities to raise the critical consciousness of people in communities and as a means to create pathways for more men to engage as gender activists.

As part of these interventions, the Role Model Men volunteer to make personal approaches to 10 selected households from their village or parish and engage men in these households in dialogues that Role Model Men facilitate. The conversations are collectively designed to raise men's awareness about GBV, challenge traditional ideas of masculinity and negative attitudes toward women, and build individual men's capacity to cultivate respectful and gender-equitable relationships within their households and social networks.

These interventions also leverage Role Model Men as the primary transmitters of social and behavioral change messaging to the communities, which increases the reach of the messaging, adds credibility, and increases the weight of the messaging resulting in a more significant impact.

And at the same time, the interventions work with Role Model Men to enhance men's role in caregiving and household responsibilities. When role model men implement changes in their households, others can observe the new activities and the results. As a result, they (men from the target population) have a regular opportunity to view the actions of the Role Model Men and are motivated to follow their example. Over time, this creates a cycle where perceptions change about typical and appropriate gender roles and gender behaviors, fostering a community-wide shift in gender relations.

> **"Some grassroots organizations identify and work with positive deviants-"Role Model Men" who do things differently from the norm."**

4.1.4 Building capacity to demand accountability

A critical gap observed among grassroots women leaders was the lack of capacity to demand greater accountability and responsiveness from public officials and service providers. Among the women leaders and their constituents, there was more of a singular focus on direct service provision and less attention to high-level advocacy and prevention work. There must be a recalibration with more attention paid to the quality and equity of local service provision, defending constituents' interests, advocacy in more equitable policy formulation and implementation to ensure accountability, transparency, and responsiveness, and holding duty-bearers accountable for delivering quality services.

To achieve this, grassroots women organizations, policymakers, government agencies, and multilateral donors must ensure that women grassroots leaders are equipped with the skills for advocacy, coalition building, government relations, peer learning and innovation, power mapping, multi-stakeholder dialogue, negotiation, policy formulation skills, convening and collaborative skills, and documentation.

To create sustained, comprehensive change that effectively addresses complex causes of gender inequality deeply rooted in systems and structures, there must be a focus on supporting grassroots women leaders to develop the capacity to engage in multi-stakeholder collaboration. Equally important is the need to foster new mindsets and support new ways of thinking among grassroots women's organizations and women leaders to make the most of opportunities to leverage different entry points — beyond elections and politics- to address GBV. Such structural change will require long-term investment in and consistent engagement with the same target populations over a long period.

These contextual variables shape the environment where violence against women happens in conflicted-affected communities. Integrating these perspectives in GBV programming at the grassroots will prove increasingly necessary. Bottom-up social and gender norm change can potentially be transformative. Still, recognizing the complex dimensions of gender relations at the household level requires simultaneous action on family and social variables.
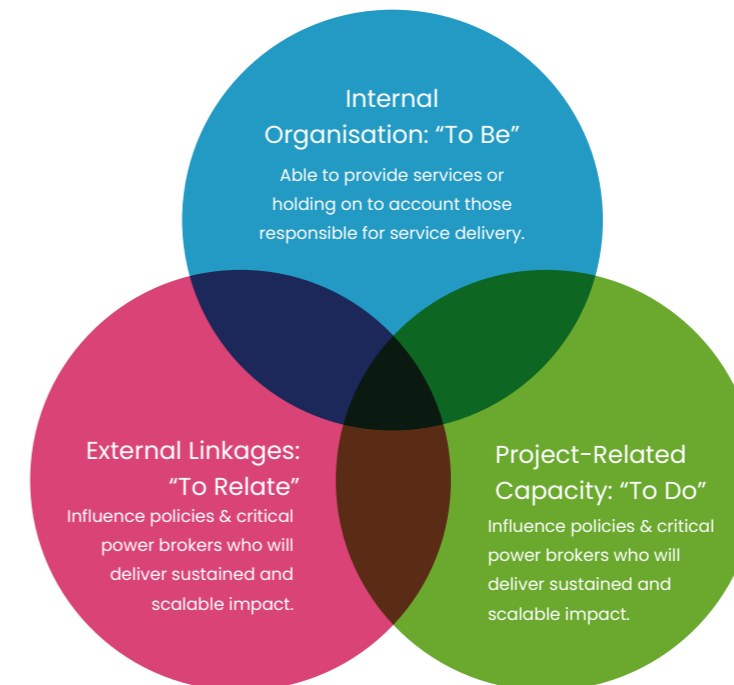
5

Factors Affecting Grassroots Women-Lead Organisations' Impact on GBV

5.1 Assessing capacities of Grassroots Women Organizations through the lens of core functional areas of an organization (To Be, To Do, To Relate)

Figure 11: Three Circle Model (Fowler 1995)

Internal Organisation: "To Be"
Able to provide services or holding on to account those responsible for service delivery.

External Linkages: "To Relate"
Influence policies & critical power brokers who will deliver sustained and scalable impact.

Project-Related Capacity: "To Do"
Influence policies & critical power brokers who will deliver sustained and scalable impact.

A helpful way of understanding an organization's overall capacity to succeed in achieving its mission is the INTRAC's Three Circle model (Fowler 1995). The Three Circle model highlights three critical dimensions of an organization's ability to accomplish its mission, be resilient, and be sustainable in three overlapping circles within a broader context: To Be, To Do, and To Relate. "To do" – refers to knowledge, skills, and attitudes in programmatic issues; "To be" – speaks to the existence of essential internal systems and structures; "To relate"- implies the existence of valuable positive external relationships with influential actors or critical power brokers who can deliver sustained and scalable impact.

The Three Circle Model allows us to consider everything that makes the organization capable of functioning more effectively and efficiently.

We used the Three Circle Model to analyze and interpret the qualitative data for assessing the grassroots women organizations and drawing conclusions on what is required to strengthen or reinforce their work. The three overlapping circles allow us to examine the context and the broader ecosystem in which grassroots women organizations operate and how this impacts their ability and potential to deliver on their mission and sustain results. In addition, the framework helps us visualize how the core functional areas intersect to achieve change and external influences that may affect grassroots women leaders and their organizations.

The assessment does not and was not designed to assess any particular initiative or set of activities, nor was the exercise intended to be a formal evaluation. Instead, the assessment took a broad, collective view of grassroots women organizations' capacities. It sought to understand where the collective strengths and constraints exist rather than exclusively focusing on individual entities.

5.2 Findings and Analysis

5.2.1 "To Do"- Building Organizational and Project-Related Capacity

The findings from the assessment indicate that support/funding for organizational capacity-building is mainly given as project-related support. Respondents indicated that most GBV prevention and response financing is short-term projects that can deliver measurable outcomes quickly and often do not include funding administrative costs. As a result, when the projects end, grassroots women's initiatives prove hard to sustain because they often cannot meet ongoing staffing and general operating expenses to work with communities to advance their aims.

In addition, lack of financing constrains the ability of grassroots women organizations to invest in essential "indirect" expenses like rent and accounting software or implement critical movement-building activities like hosting meetings and negotiations with other partners or joining advocacy coalitions to promote their cause. Without the money for indirect costs, grassroots organizations cannot effectively implement interventions, potentially making them less attractive to future funders.


*Source & Mix of Revenue for Grassroots Womens Organizations*
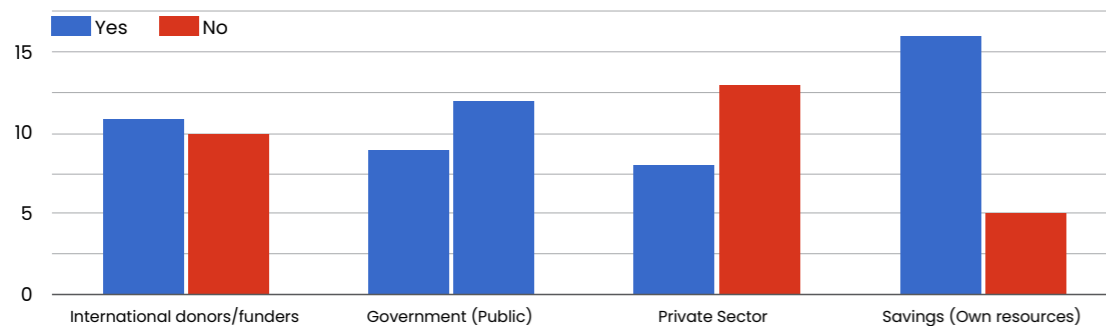
Capacity Building as Actionable Learning can potentially make grassroots organizations more effective in pushing for broader systemic change; however, few funders/donors resource it. The few funders that do so limit their support to that required for carrying out specific project-related tasks but not to develop organizational capabilities

such as effective leadership and management of administrative and financial systems and processes needed to be effective. Very few funders will provide support for building beneficial external relationships necessary to survive in a complex environment, including resource mobilization, communications or networks, and alliances

Top Skills Grassroots Women Leaders Desire to Improve
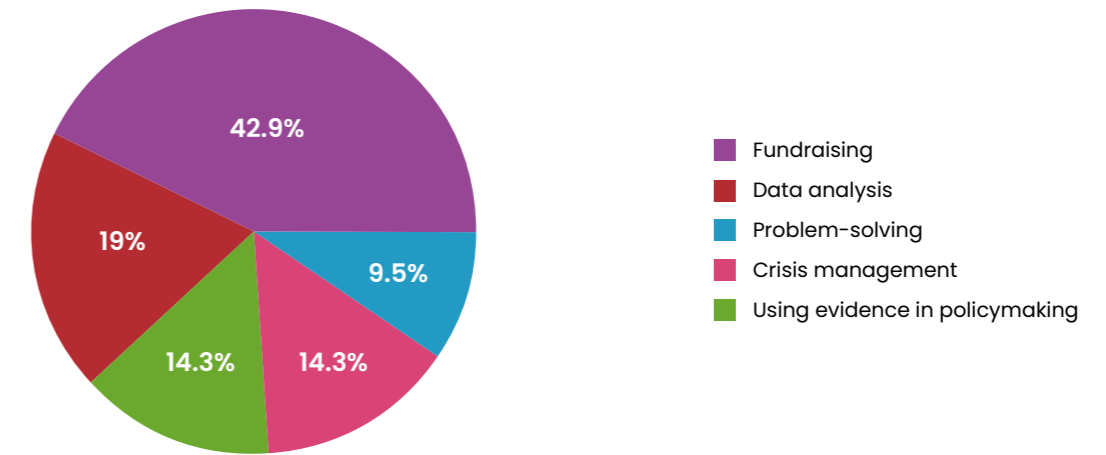
Constraints to The Attainment of Advocacy & Campaigning Goals Ranked by Respondents
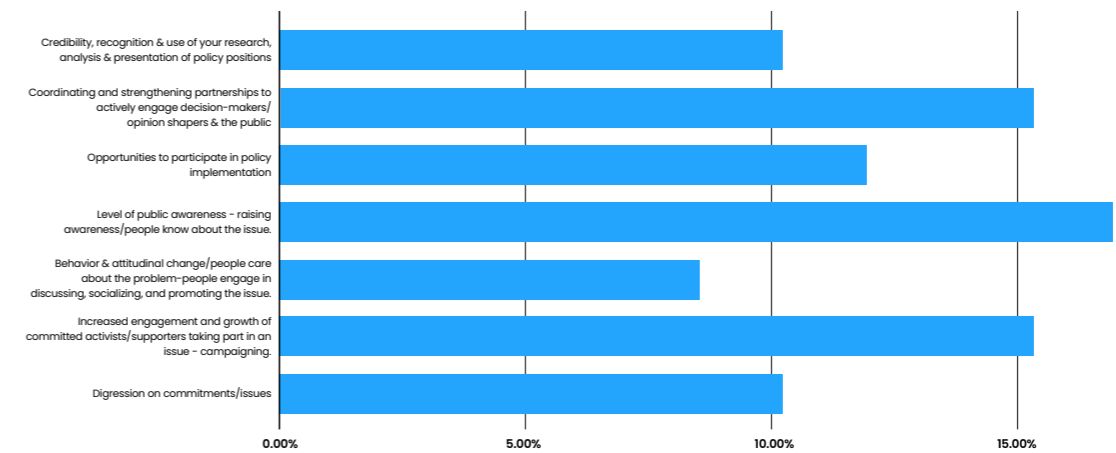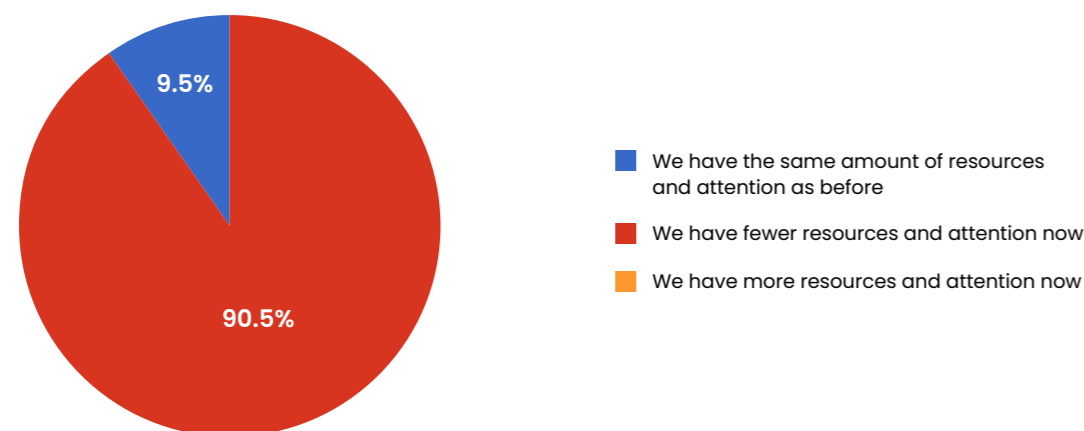
It is also proving difficult for grassroots women's organizations to innovate and expand to scale or sustain results beyond the project funding period. Chronic underfunding further prevents women-led grassroots organizations from stabilizing, expanding, diversifying their activities, and growing into strong and resilient institutions. The precarious financial situation further impairs the survival of many grassroots women's organizations — which leads to the question of how the learning they have encouraged, the relationships they have fostered, and the advocacy they lead to can be maintained and expanded.

"We need office space (office rent). COVID-19 affected most of our activities. Even though we had to vacate our office premises, most beneficiaries find it difficult to access our service as we have had to relocate. Currently, we are using one of the staff compounds for our operations. We also lack finances; our budgets have no funds, meaning as an organization, we are held back from carrying out some planned interventions,"

FGD participant, Acholi region.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Grassroots Women's Programming & Operations

- 9.5% — We have the same amount of resources and attention as before
- 90.5% — We have fewer resources and attention now
- We have more resources and attention now

It remains particularly challenging for women-led grassroots organizations to attract funding mainly because of the actual or perceived risk. Current funding modalities often assume that sufficient and functional organizational structures exist in these grassroots organizations with good institutional and administrative capacities. However, there usually is a gap between the ideal and the reality.

Many grassroots organizations have yet to implement strong financial management, accounting, and reporting systems that capture critical financial accounts, performance data, and impact measurement. Most lack credit history, audited financial statements, and concrete informed strategic plans. Yet, the inadequate supply of funding perpetuates a vicious cycle of insufficient staff, limited ability to address operational needs, and an inability to reach their full potential.

Even with project-based funding, grassroots women's organizations only receive a small fraction of the available financial resources. As a result, grassroots women's organizations are forced to compete for the same limited project-based funding. Competition creates fractions, sowing division, discouraging collaboration, and disincentivizing collective action and coalition building. For example, even when they successfully collaborate, rivalries emerge over who gets the credit within a coalition around a specific issue.

5.2.1.1.1 Equitable funding opportunities

Thus, opportunities to secure funding need to be more equitable —offer smaller grassroots women organizations a chance to obtain the financing for their aims and projects. The challenge is not simply a question of securing funding but also of the right kind. Strategic funding that responds to thematic needs (practical and strategic gender needs—women's economic empowerment programs and women's movement building) can enhance and bring societal changes. However, appropriate financing that contributes to the maturity of women-led grassroots organizations and their desire to implement longer-term interventions to address strategic gender needs, including taking measures against violence against women, is mostly inaccessible.

A lack of equitable funding opportunities is compounded by a chronic shortage of philanthropy funding for violence prevention. Unfortunately, this severely curtails women's opportunities to lead prevention and protection work in communities, actively engage with structural issues, influence government policy, and invest in creating positive systemic change for women and girls.

Philanthropy funding is needed to address the root cause of social problems that necessitate a more strategic, long-term approach.

Undoubtedly, the right kind of funding is crucial to the development and stability of grassroots women organizations. Grassroots women organizations require flexible long-term support. Still, it requires innovative funding modalities, donor/funder flexibility, and strong advocates for grassroots women organizations within the development sector.

Thus, the first critical step is to help women-led grassroots organizations build relationships with philanthropists and women's funds, including women's networks. However, we understand that a flexible strategic funding approach is also not without difficulties. The two main problems the funder needs to face are the risk of failure and the challenges in measuring impact. Identifying each partner's value in more straightforward transactional partnerships is much easier. However, once we turn attention to some of the new models of partnerships and the goals they seek to achieve, the complex nature of these partnerships alongside other associations such as coalitions and networks makes them more challenging to evaluate.

Partnerships, particularly with development partners, donors, and INGOs, are often driven by organizational systems rather than facilitating grassroots women organizations' pragmatic responses to systemic, complex, and multifaceted social issues. To a large extent, whether and which grassroots organizations are supported depends primarily on the funders' priorities and the organization's ability to write a winning proposal.

However, the unique value that grassroots women organizations bring to partnerships based on their identities and experiences compared to other institutions is a resource that should be captured and used to justify why donors need to build and maintain a long-term relationship with them.

> **"The two main problems the funder needs to face are the risk of failure and the challenges in measuring impact."**

For example, structural change requires long-term investment—initiatives that seek to change behavior — which requires long-term, consistent engagement working with the same target populations over a long period. Behavioral change messages must be repeated and reinforced over time until they permeate the target population's consciousness. People need convincing of the value of behavioral change, and thus more time must be dedicated to building trust and community buy-in. This can be a long journey that can only be practically done by local people in rural communities —accessible to communities and reaching directly to communities to spend time with them to understand them. Grassroots implementers often have to go door to door — individually approach people from the communities they want to work with. Working with communities this way takes time to build trust, so one also cannot expect results in a short period.

Moreover, approaches that entrust responsibility to community members embedded in rural communities can stimulate the initiative and encourage the commitment of these people to the solutions to community problems. By discovering their ability to find answers to their problems, these community members legitimize their potential in their own eyes. Empowerment conducted in this way represents a powerful means to build and maximize capacity among the target communities and ensure some measure of endurance of the project after the donors have left.

Effective partnerships take considerable effort, work, and time commitment and require an upfront investment in building the institutional and administrative capacities-processes and systems to support effective implementation and grant management. Current funding modalities often assume that sufficient and functional organizational structures exist in these grassroots organizations with good institutional and administrative capacities.

But beyond financial support for program activities, there is a need to recognize that there often is a gap between the ideal and the reality. This indicates a need to complement the focus on the transactional or contractual approach to managing partnerships with more upfront investment in helping grassroots women organizations build the processes and systems to implement that partnership effectively.

In addition, donor funding comes with stringent eligibility requirements for funding applicants, such as financial management systems, internal audit control processes, and complex compliance requirements, which often deter local organizations with limited staff and resources. In addition, the grant application and management processes require specific know-how and various tools and resources. The institutional capacities needed to facilitate these processes are also considerable, which many grassroots organizations do not have. Many are thus involved in a balancing act of spending a significant portion of their time managing multiple partnership relations and accountabilities alongside direct service provision.

Grassroots organizations with the capacity to deliver critical services often need funding and support to build more robust organizational, managerial, and financial systems and develop technical proposal writing and grant management skills to meet donor reporting requirements. Without this, their access to significant funding remains limited.

> *"We have limited financial resources—currently, we can only work with 200 women because we don't have enough funding to support activities. Even conducting community outreach is a huge challenge, yet so many women could use the help and benefit from our support"*
>
> **FGD participant, KOWDO, Soroti.**

> *"Financial support to continue conducting the different radio talk shows and keep reaching out to different victims, not discriminating against anyone, and supporting the organization's administration. Case Management skills to enable us to handle different cases as they present themselves differently and doing follow-up visits"*
>
> **KII with NACWOLA, Arua district leader.**

5.2.1.1.2 Addressing misperceptions

In many cases, roles performed by women survivor leaders as principal agents of change are carried out voluntarily. Many donors seek to harness and build upon the idea of community volunteerism, and there is an expectation that a significant portion of projects will be unremunerated. As such, the funding that is made available does not include staffing costs or overheads. This is unfortunate, given that many women leaders are impoverished and from conflict-affected communities. While harnessing the strengths and resources of each organization and community is essential, there must be caution in the assumptions about the assets that communities can leverage.

At the root of the problem is a misperception about the nature of these organizations. Despite their critical role in providing human services, they struggle to attract meaningfully and sustained public and political support due to a misperception among the public and policymakers that their work is merely charitable assistance provided by volunteers with the help of benevolent donors. There is also a perception that the main task of grassroots organizations is to respond to crises where there is an immediate or urgent need.

Gaps in staff capacity and resources at the local government level to ensure that the social care and support services respond to urgent needs are indeed being filled by many grassroots organizations.
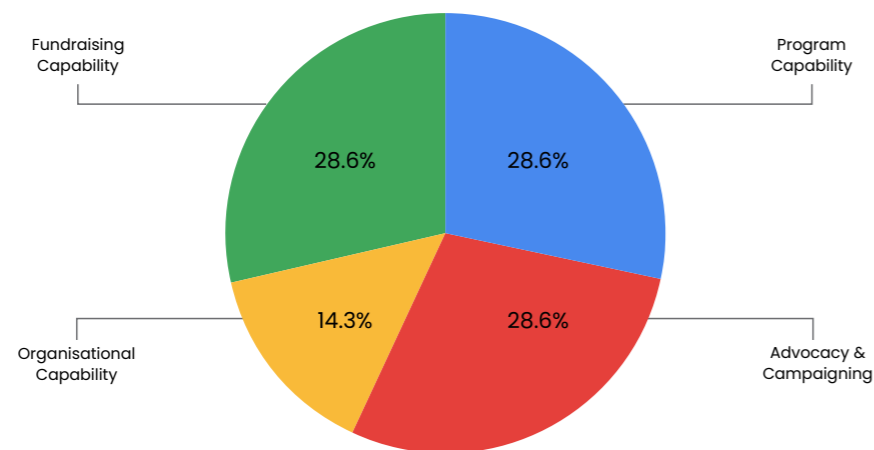
However, the scope of their work is much broader and should be refinanced. This is more than a funding issue. It requires a complete **reframing, packaging, and communication** of the work of grassroots organizations to attract increased public financing and make the investment in their work a policy priority.

The potential for community volunteers to champion change in the foreseeable future depends on stakeholders, including donors/funders developing appropriate incentives. Therefore, local governments must provide incentives to community volunteers and persuade communities to offer community volunteers tangible support in whatever shape or form to sustain their efforts. Therefore, supporting the stakeholders to carry out financial, economic, or social cost-benefit analysis or some equivalent is crucial to inform this issue.

> **"The potential for community volunteers to champion change in the foreseeable future depends on stakeholders, including donors/funders developing appropriate incentives."**

5.2.2 "To Be" – Building Internal Capacity (Core competence, technical skills, and leadership development)

Top Priorities to Strengthen Internal Capability Ranked by Respondents

Fundraising Capability — 28.6%
Program Capability — 28.6%
Organisational Capability — 14.3%
Advocacy & Campaigning — 28.6%

5.2.2.1.1 Core competence and technical skills

Even where grassroots women's organizations can overcome funding constraints and afford the total cost of operations, staff do not necessarily have the core competence– knowledge, skills, and attitudes, technical approaches they need to be effective. For example, participation of women leaders and women's organizations in advancing the SGBV agenda at all decision-making levels will entail adopting an explicitly political approach — shifting programming to influence effective policy implementation for a more gender-equitable and empowering environment for all women and girls.

Addressing inequality is increasingly a matter of national distribution and the domestic political economy. This might mean, for example, shifting focus to advocating for domestic policy processes that favor the redistribution of economic, social, and political power, such as changes to public expenditure. This means that grassroots women's organizations involve themselves more intimately with domestic political processes, leading grassroots campaigns at both local and national levels to drive political will and resources for violence prevention.

This will require a shift to an approach where women have a stronger political voice and decision-making power in governance structures and public services.

At the grassroots level, it might mean, for example, defending constituents' interests, engaging in policy formulation and implementation to ensure accountability, transparency, and responsiveness, and holding duty-bearers accountable for delivering quality services — requiring a shift in technical and operational capabilities and resources. Grassroots women's organizations need to be equipped with the skills for advocacy, coalition building, government relations, peer learning and innovation, power mapping, multi-stakeholder dialogue, negotiation, policy formulation skills, convening and collaborative skills, and documentation. Equally important is the need to foster new mindsets and support new ways of thinking among grassroots women's organizations and women leaders to make the most of these opportunities to leverage different entry points to prevent violence — beyond elections and politics.

5.2.2.1.2 Developing strategic thinking, innovation, adaptiveness, and responsiveness

Another significant obstacle grassroots organizations face is how to be adaptive to overcome many challenges embedded in complex social systems. Grassroots organizations need to be helped to discover how to refine their approaches and use insights when they happen, not just stick blindly to the plan. Grassroots organizations need concrete advice, techniques, and tips to make themselves and their teams more intentionally adaptive. Learning how to manage risks and adapt will ensure faster progress.

Program support should build in a time and space where grassroots organizations can reflect and learn from data and insights from their work. They ask critical questions, challenge their assumptions, and make strategic decisions vital to adapting their practices and thinking to the initiative in real-time ways that make a difference. The grantees must be given discretion to course correct, make adjustments, and be adaptive based on the feedback and data.

5.2.2.1.3 Political and decision-making capacity

One of the critical qualities of women grassroots leaders is the capability to ignite change— unlocking the potential of all community members to contribute meaningfully to the change process. Beyond being politicians, elected local councilors, and local government representatives, grassroots women leaders must cultivate the ability to engage others as change-makers at all levels. Shifting power dynamics within their systems requires all members of their communities to contribute to defining and co-creating a better future.

For example, the responsibility for delivering on gender equity commitments lies with national and local governments leading and affecting change and becoming more accountable and citizen-entered. But this is unlikely to happen unless communities demand it. Service delivery must be community-driven and effective implementation of government policies must be underpinned by an awakening of community demand, particularly in local communities.

Citizen-centered activism can be a powerful transformative force driven by real community needs and preferences. And so, there is an urgent need for grassroots communities to insist on implementation at a local level and make the necessary demands on governments to deliver in practice.

Thus, building people's awareness of their rights and critical consciousness and their ability to engage with duty bearers and political representatives and advocate for action and reforms that will enable the government to take up its responsibility of fulfilling people's fundamental rights is critical. Thus, it is vital to work with grassroots women to see their potential in themselves and their communities.

> **"Service delivery must be community-driven and effective implementation of government policies must be underpinned by an awakening of community demand, particularly in local communities."**

5.2.2.1.4 Capacity for analysis, self-organization, and communication

There is a need to build grassroots women's capacity for systems analysis, self-organization, and coordination. Leadership training or capacity development should be targeted toward grassroots women leaders and their organizations at different places in the system. Whether grassroots women leaders are playing new roles or improving the way they perform existing ones, there is a need to enhance understanding of how their roles fit into the system, support them to implement them more efficiently at a technical level, and encourage individual actors to interact with each other more effectively. Emphasis on training is justified where there is technical change, and new roles are created.

Furthermore, this assessment underlines the extent to which women survivor leaders value training and capacity development, and the prospect of training can be an incentive to innovate.

Communication strategies are crucial for building grassroots women leaders' capacity to inform and inspire communities to make the necessary demands on governments to deliver in practice.

Increasingly, grassroots women leaders must make the best possible communications choices to build trust, understanding, and action around the issues they care about. Invariably, this means changing people's behavior. The ability to inspire and convince will largely depend on how grassroots women leaders frame their messaging, communicate critical issues and open up lines of communication with diverse stakeholders and institutions. In addition, they need support in social mobilization and social and behavior change communication to promote fundamental behavior change.

Grassroots communicators need to think about the strategies they can use to get people to change their behavior. Our survey revealed that some women leaders found it challenging to define and set behavioral objectives for communication. There is potential value in supporting grassroots women leaders to acquire skills to frame and reframe issues to open up more productive lines of communication with stakeholders with different experiences, perspectives, and ideologies.

Their ability to inspire and push for broader systemic change in an increasingly polarized landscape critically depends on their ability to frame and reframe social-political issues. Frames shape how people attribute responsibility, understand how an issue works, and support proposed solutions. Finally, appealing to shared values is a vital part of framing. Shared values motivate engagement, generate a sense that problems can be solved, and increase people's receptivity to solutions by helping them see the purpose of specific alternatives or solutions.

Reimagining women leaders as social brokers

We need to reimagine women leaders as social brokers— operating between elections and beyond partisan politics, from sharing and framing information about local needs & govt performance to crafting actionable narratives for citizens and officials (Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner, 2022). Women leaders as social brokers lead the facilitation and development of linkages between citizens and officials and aid information flow without expecting an electoral return. Women leaders as social brokers would help foster better communication, connection, and coordination between citizens and local government officials.

Their role in brokering between different local actors such as the citizens and local governments can create practical solutions to structural issues and elicit a much stronger commitment from duty bearers. Thus, equally important is the need to foster new mindsets and support new ways of thinking among grassroots women's organizations and women leaders to make the most of these opportunities to leverage different entry points to prevent violence— beyond elections and politics.

5.2.2.1.5 Continuous Development and Well-being

While many grassroots organizations aspire to be learning organizations, commitment to learning requires time, effort, and resources— which they lack. Consequently, many grassroots women leaders tend to focus on practical issues where they have the expertise at the expense of broader strategic issues that would allow them to develop themselves and their organizations.

We need to support grassroots women to integrate intentional learning into their organizations. People need time to come together with a clear purpose for learning, adequate planning, and preparation with skilled facilitators.

It is critical for projects to build-in time and space for reflection and learning: firstly, to individually and collectively increase their awareness and understanding and develop new perspectives, and secondly, to generate new ideas or solutions. It is also essential for groups to come together to make crucial decisions, learn and engage, and achieve consensus and agreement on a path forward. Finally, grassroots women must come together to learn from each other and their experiences to take more effective action.

The last quality we see as essential to women's leadership is well-being. It is worth noting that the systems and culture in the social sector generally don't support well-being. In the context of scarcity within which grassroots women leaders operate, investing in well-being is not an act of self-indulgence. Well-being is critical for grassroots women leaders' self-preservation and resilience, and it directly influences the type and quality of their impact as leaders in their communities. Another essential aspect of self-care is peer networks for grassroots women leaders, finding others with whom they can share their experiences and support.

5.2.3 "To Relate" – Building and Sustaining External Linkages Capabilities

5.2.3.1.1 Cultivating strategic relationships

This assessment found that grassroots women organizations tend to focus on finances and primarily on achieving project outcomes, but this crowds out other less quantifiable— the relational aspects. Cultivating positive (or helpful) external relationships is essential to gain support to drive an agenda forward and build constituencies of support, stronger partnerships, collaborations, and institutional linkages to increase outcomes. Strengthening and enhancing the relationships and interactions of grassroots women organizations within the social sector will increase effectiveness and sustainability.

Many respondents mentioned struggling to influence, convince and bridge the divide between themselves and stakeholders with different perspectives. For example, there is also a persistent feeling that there is shrinking space for non-government actors. Therefore, increasingly grassroots communicators/activists need to make the best possible communications choices to build trust, understanding, and action around the issues they care about. This translates into changing how grassroots women leaders communicate and helping them develop the capacity to individually and collectively advocate, communicate and collaborate with radically diverse stakeholders.

Another challenge for grassroots women leaders is preparing for and managing resistance and backlash. Attempts to change gender norms can run into resistance and backlash. Raising awareness can trigger backlash when viewed as attacking values and traditions, which can delay progress on an issue. Grassroots women leaders need skills in managing the process of engagement in controversy in a way that exerts positive developmental outcomes.

"Our laws on GBV are strong, but their implementation is weak. Most women in our community can't handle domestic violence issues; there is a lack of trained women in the community. How will you push your agenda? Who can listen to you if you cannot articulate your issues?"

KII with the leader of Karamoja Women Umbrella Organization

"Partnerships opportunities are limited— we would love to partner with other more established organizations but have not yet gotten the space. Yet we believe it's an opportunity to learn from them,"

KII with a women survivor leader, Lira district

"To a great extent, men have stopped violating women's and girls' rights, which has been so because of the naming and shaming approach we use in the open air. But, on the negative side, they also look at us as women who have spoiled their marriages and over-empower their wives, so most keep throwing insults at us when we pass by them,"

**FGD participant, Kitgum district**
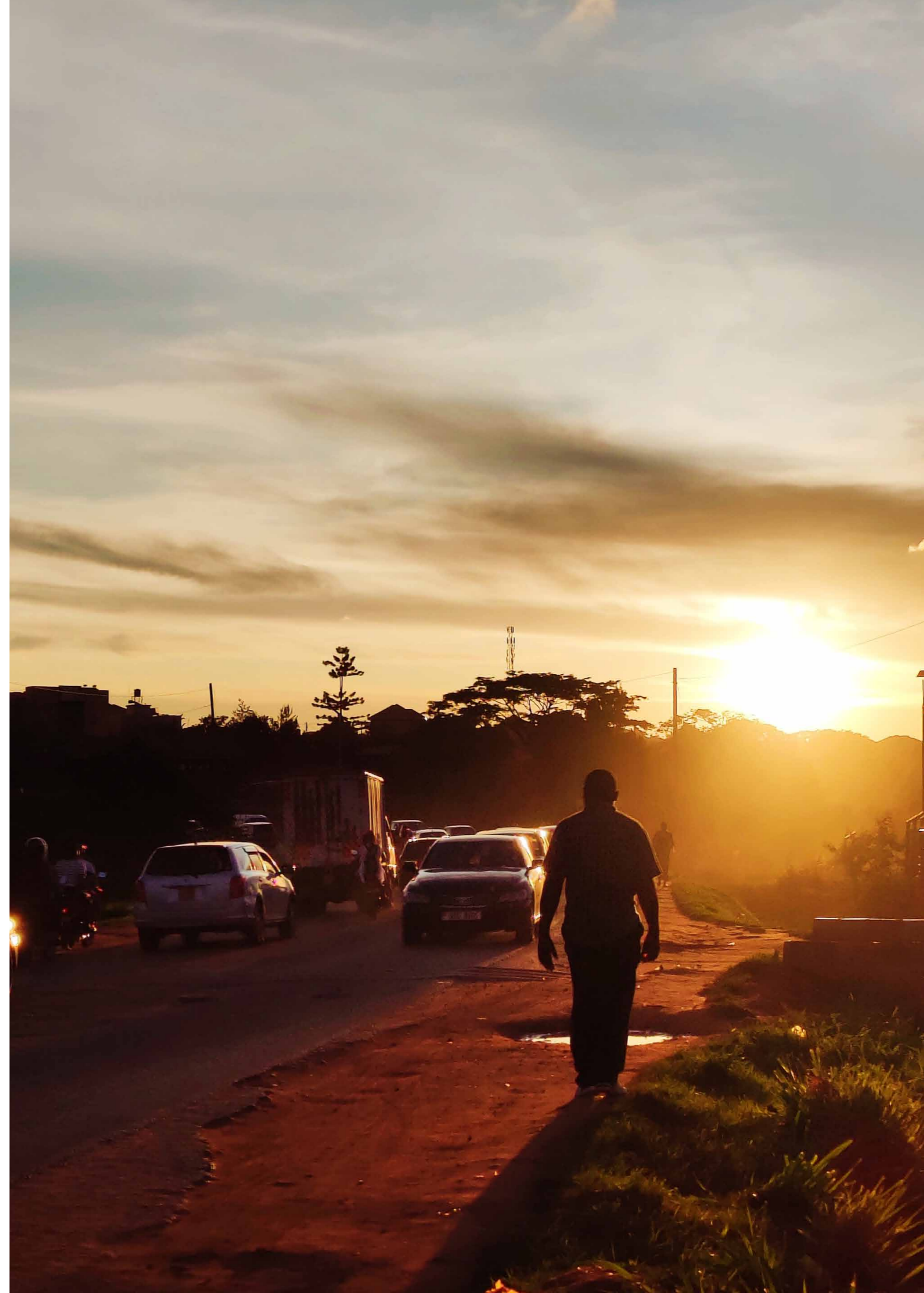
6

Recommendations

6.1 Pathways To Intervene To Strengthen Grassroots Women's Organizations

Based on this needs assessment, we make the following recommendations to strengthen the role of women's organizations in delivering GBV prevention and response services across five pathways: (i.e., Influence, Income, Impact, Innovation, and Identity)

Influence

Income

Innovation

Identity

Impact
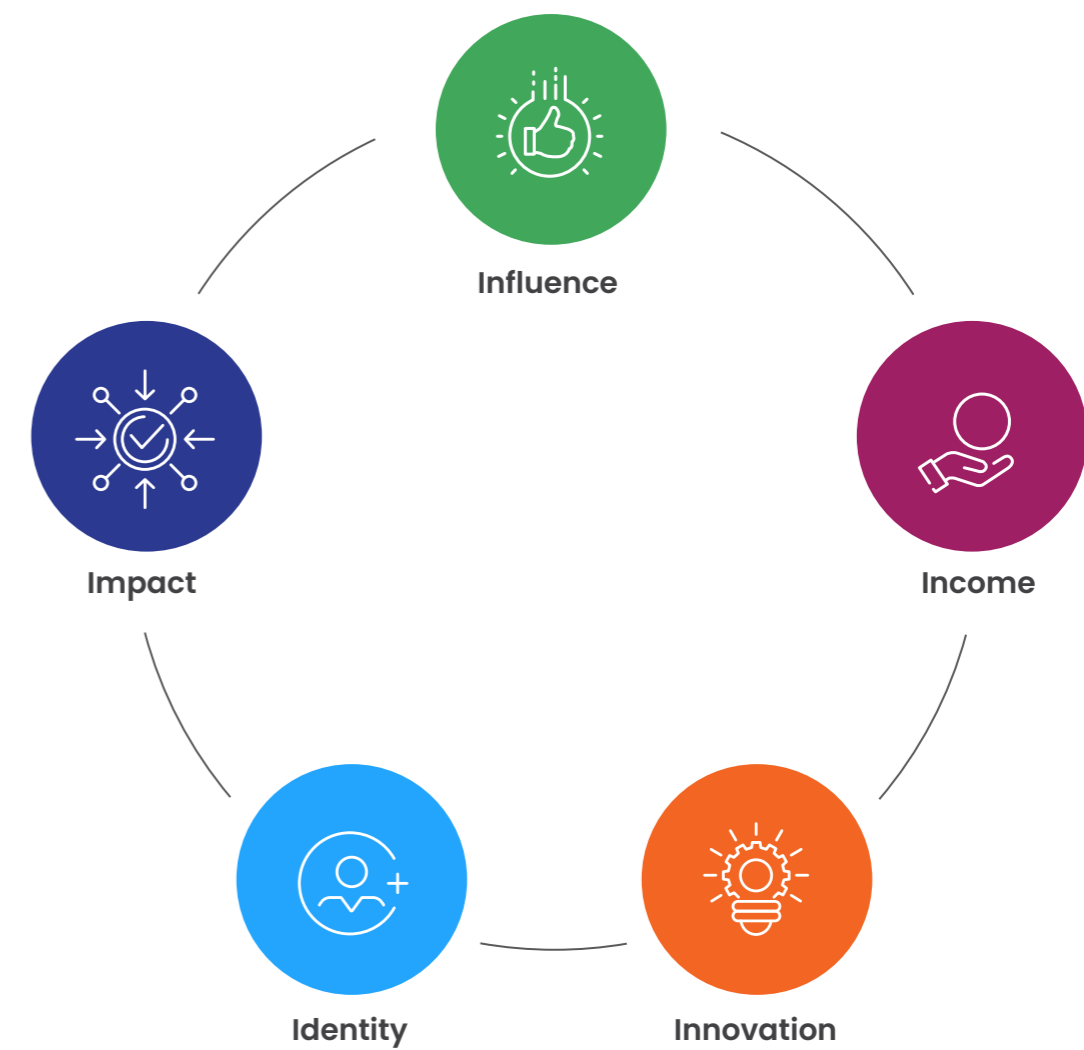
Income

Funding

- Ensure that organizations led by women survivors receive an equitable share of grant and philanthropic funding
- Reinforce funding for local organizations and remove barriers that prevent their access to financing
- Provide tailored funding using a high-touch approach to help build women's organizations' capabilities to strengthen/ put in place operational, administrative, and financial systems to lower risk.
- Disburse tailored investment capital in the form of patient capital or philanthropic donations
- Explore more innovative approaches to the due diligence process

The Right Type of Funding

• Mobilize philanthropic funding and invest in grassroots initiatives that address systemic barriers to gender justice. For example, suppose we seek to make a difference at the root causes level. In that case, grassroots women's organizations need philanthropic funding to expand impact beyond the traditional practical gender needs and lay the groundwork for long - term improvements in strategic gender needs.

For UN Agencies and International Development Community

- Prioritize partnerships with and facilitate access to funding for grassroots women's organizations working to end GBV in their communities.

- Employ a flexible approach that recognizes that grassroots women's organizations are at different levels of capabilities and competencies. A more flexible understanding of the potential ways of partnering and funding grassroots organizations is needed.

- Facilitate grassroots women's organizations'

capabilities assessment as this can be an eye-opener. It gives a comprehensive picture of the organization and its needs and becomes a valuable tool for identifying areas requiring strengthening, upskilling, and mentoring. (i.e., program capability, advocacy/campaigning capability, organizational capability—operational/administrative capacities—and fundraising capability)

- Promote and support partnerships with grassroots women's organizations by connecting them to highly skilled GBV technical and functional professionals and experts that share evidence and best practices / innovations to help them strengthen systems and service delivery in real-time.

- Recognize the link between operational and technical needs in organizational development: Thus, support to women's organizations must consider not only GBV technical know-how but also how financial, administrative, personnel, procurement, and ICT systems must adapt to ensure adequate capabilities and the resources required to do so.

- Promote equitable partnership models between national/regional/international and grassroots women's organizations. As a result, women organizations at the micro and macro level better understand and build on their knowledge and response capacity and employ joint strategic decision - making in intervention design, implementation process, or outcomes.

- Invest in sustained capacity and institutional strengthening for grassroots women's organizations —strengthen operationally and GBV technical programming capabilities through training, ongoing mentoring, financing, and supporting prevention, mitigation, and response initiatives.

For Donors/Funders

Equitable grantmaking— ensure grassroots women organizations receive a fair share of donor resources and philanthropic funding. Philanthropic funding is required to tackle the underlying conditions that perpetuate gender inequities (including those related to cultural norms, men, and masculinity) and identify system-level actions through which different actors can work to change those conditions.

• Expand the mix of funding and channels for financing grassroots women organizations to build reputation, influence, advocacy, and program excellence

• Ensure grant processes enable collaboratives to apply and access funding: Create the conditions for collaboration and partnerships with grassroots women's organizations to succeed by incentivizing and prioritizing funding for initiatives that demonstrate women's organizations' active decision-making in project design, capacity

building, project implementation, and evaluation of GBV initiatives.

• Commit to long-term flexible and unrestricted funding to support core administrative costs and technical and operational capacity building of local and women's organizations to strengthen their leadership in ending GBV.

• Remove barriers to direct financing of grassroots organizations and stringent sub-granting approval procedures to allow international agencies to partner with local organizations working to end GBV in their communities.

Influence

Build Women's Movement & Leadership Development for Gender Justice:

We need to invest in women's rights collectively through movement-building approaches and women's economic empowerment programs while learning from and with grassroots women's rights organizations and researching what is working to create systemic change—opportunities and platforms for sharing information, collaborating and partnering for movement building and activism in gender equity.

- Create and sustain a compelling grassroots women's movement identity as a positive force across civil society

- Invest directly and more in the capacity of communities to organize themselves and advocate effectively for longer-term improvements in social, political, and economic development for women and girls.

- Strengthen the voice, impact, and influence of women by building strong and vibrant women's networks and associations at the grassroots level

- Strengthen and expand women's civic engagement and political participation at the grassroots level through leadership development.

- Build a strong grassroots advocacy capacity to promote pro-poor and pro-women policies and safety nets, promote social accountability, and enable women's voices as active participants and leaders for just change.

- Build Grassroots Women's Groups and Organizations' capacity to advocate, communicate and collaborate with radically diverse stakeholders to help stimulate new and more effective ways of working to achieve their goals.

- Focus on supporting essential movement-building activities like forming strong women's networks and coalitions; creating safe spaces for women's groups to collaborate, strategize, and build alliances to mobilize for change effectively is invaluable.

- Provide long-term funding, training, and general operating support to grassroots women organizations to work collaboratively to form pressure groups, alliances, and coalitions and organize advocacy campaigns on national and international levels for legal reforms and implementation of laws that will further women's human rights.

Identity

Reframe the work the grassroots women's organizations do, from charity/aid to human services:

Despite grassroots women's organizations' critical role in providing human services, they struggle to attract meaningfully and sustained public and political support. The public and policymakers often think of non-profit work as only temporary support for people in crisis. The general public and policymakers see grassroots organizations' work as discrete acts of charity done by volunteers with the help of benevolent donors. They see grassroots organizations' work almost entirely as reacting to immediate needs.

There is immense opportunity to support grassroots women's organizations in reframing, packaging, and communicating the work, they do in a manner that makes them amenable to increased public financing and creates an obligation for the government to invest in grassroots women and community-based solutions.

Create and sustain a compelling grassroots women's movement identity as a positive force across civil society

- **Empower advocates with leadership qualities for systemic change:** Supporting grassroots women leaders to engage relevant internal and external stakeholders, building coalitions, and building alliances and partnerships that address gender equity.

- Systemic change is generally understood to require adjustments or transformations in the policies, practices, power dynamics, social norms, or mindsets that underlie the societal issue at stake. It often involves the collaboration of diverse players and can take place locally, nationally, or globally.

- Focus on leadership qualities and attributes that can support grassroots women leaders to facilitate multi-stakeholder collaboration needed for systemic change. Currently, grassroots women leaders predominately perceive leadership as an individual skill. Still, it is also essential to see leadership as a collective leadership capacity— the power of every member in a community to contribute in their way. Because the reality is that structural / systemic change generally requires many actors in the system to be engaged.

- Leadership Training or capacity development should be targeted toward women leaders and their organizations at different places in the system. Whether they are playing new roles or improving the way they perform existing ones, there is a need to enhance understanding of how their roles fit into the system, implement them more efficiently at a technical level, and encourage individual actors to interact with each other more effectively.

- Emphasis on training is justified where there is technical change, and new roles are created. Furthermore, this assessment underlines the extent to which women survivor leaders value training and capacity development, and the prospect of training can be an incentive to innovate.

Impact

Strategic Shifts That Need To Happen

Concentrate on new Models/Approaches (Operating, Programming, Funding, Engagement)

In the immediate and medium-term, support to grassroots women organizations must focus on their Models/Approaches even more than on their Capabilities:

Approaches to Development Programming

From micro - to macro & from projects – to a systems approach: from the more micro-projects and programs approaches to the more macro systems approaches to development.

Contribute to both micro and macro solutions and supports root causes and systemic development issues:

- Mobilize long-term funding for systemic and root cause solutions—given the increasing importance of better tackling and addressing the root causes of inequalities.

- Concentrate just as much on policy reform at district and national levels as on operations and programming (i.e., root causes will not be addressed by operations and programming expertise and spending.

From the "problem solving" paradigm – to the "solution creation" paradigm:

Support mindset shift from the more traditional problem-solving approaches to the more transformational solutions approaches. Donors may as need behavior change as grassroots women's organizations.

New Engagement Models

From Silos to Networks— create and establish a roadmap to move grassroots women organizations from "Silos" to Networks;

New Funding Models

- Help grassroots women survivors find and nurture relationships with the donors for gender justice and women's rights funding; increase grassroots women organizations' share of the donor resources;

- Match the flexibility and duration of their funding to the demands and arc of change

- Proactively reach out to grassroots women organizations to ensure that grantmaking processes are clear and accessible.

- Be realistic about what results can reasonably be achieved for grants of different types and sizes

- Develop and design new unique funding models, and approaches and requirements that make the best of the characteristics of grassroots women organizations and initiatives;

Concentrate on finding new donor sources: (i.e., Philanthropic, Foundations, PPPs, Multilaterals, Social Investment Capital, and Impact Bonds)

- Build out the critical capacity of Grassroots Women's Groups and Organizations for self-sufficiency in mobilizing resources and fundraising in all its forms, prioritizing the ability to win and execute grants from governments and donor agencies.

Concentrate on strengthening core competencies and capabilities and building new ones: (i.e., much of the existing skill-sets when matched against realities — the need to address the root causes of inequalities requires training and upskilling, particularly in advocacy, social, and behavior change communication.

Communication to drive social change: Building trust, understanding, and action around gender justice issues critically depend on the arguments' strength and effectively framing and communication of problems and solutions at both policymaking and implementation levels to enable decision-makers to respond realistically and effectually; this translates into changing how women leaders and grassroots organizations communicate and creating narratives that describe and back up what they say and do— building the capacity to advocate, communicate and collaborate with radically diverse stakeholders.

Partnerships and collaborations that are effective for systems change: new partnership approaches are needed to build the long-term institutional capacity and strengthen the role of grassroots women's organizations in delivering GBV prevention and response services.

- Support grassroots women's organizations to consistently identify and nurture relationships with influential actors and institutions.

- Prioritize building equal partnerships with grassroots women organizations: the added value that grassroots women organizations bring to partnerships based on their identities and experiences compared to other institutions should be captured to justify why donors need to build and maintain a long-term relationship with them.

- Prioritize local partnerships and support grassroots women organizations with the skills, tools, and resources needed to prevent, mitigate and respond to GBV.

Innovation

Support dissemination and adoption of evidence-backed practices/innovations in GBV programming and advocacy:

- Proactively identify initiatives with the potential to generate broader effects and disseminate insights and practical tools to improve the effectiveness of grassroots women organizations.

- Enhance the capacities and funding for grassroots women's organizations to support them in adopting evidence-backed practices and services.

- Strengthening the operational and financial capacities should go hand-in-hand with technical ability on GBV programming, technical approaches, and advocacy.

- Field-based programmatic/technical support and mentoring over time, rather than just one-off training, significantly impacts local and women's organizations' ability to immediately apply to learn, adapt and create longer-term sustainability.

Document South-to-South Development Model:
There are immense opportunities to work with grassroots organizations to document development models and approaches that are emerging from the South that have the potential to accelerate development practice in GBV prevention, mitigation, and response. (e.g., Role Model Men)

Technology and Innovation for Gender Justice:
some of these hard to fund elements may include innovation, core institutional functional improvements, and new technologies, but these may allow for a wider variety of stakeholder engagement plus a broader spectrum of development funding and financing opportunities;

- Increase the capacity of grassroots women organizations to seek and use information and technologies to solve system challenges, improve their practices, and increase their reach and impact.

- Support grassroots women organizations to build digital capacity and leverage technology to transform how they operate and serve constituents; efficiently collect data and use it to refine their programming.

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