



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS PREVENTABLE: GLOBAL “WHAT WORKS” PROGRAMME INCREASES LEARNING

Key messages

The United Kingdom's What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls research and innovation programme was the first multi-country study to conduct rigorous evaluations. It generated evidence as a global public good, showing that prevention is effective. Thinking about research uptake from the very beginning and investing in partnerships and capacity-building were two key lessons.

Keywords

[Crises, fragility and humanitarian assistance](#) | [Gender equality](#) | [Innovation](#) | [Learning and knowledge management](#)

Key partner

[United Kingdom](#)

Challenge

Tackling a global challenge such as violence against women and girls (VAWG) and ensuring effective development co-operation interventions requires understanding which approaches are effective and under what conditions. In the past, most programmes focused on providing a response for survivors rather than prevention. Preventing VAWG was poorly understood and the overall field of VAWG lacked rigorous data and evidence to guide effective prevention policies and programming.

Approach

In 2014, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) launched the GBP 25 million research and innovation programme “What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls”. The programme aimed to build a shared understanding of the root causes of VAWG in low and middle-income countries, and how it can be effectively prevented. Its key features were:

- **Combining research, innovation and evaluation in different contexts.** The programme funded the design, implementation and rigorous evaluation of fifteen innovative prevention interventions across

twelve countries in Africa and Asia with the potential to be taken to scale. It also conducted research on the causes and prevalence of VAWG, including in conflict and humanitarian emergencies and related to disabilities. Finally, it assessed the economic and social costs of VAWG and the cost effectiveness of violence prevention.

- **Leading international experts.** Led by a consortium headed by the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway, the programme engaged experts to produce rigorous evidence on the most effective interventions that can drive down rates of VAWG.
- **Evidence seen as a global public good.** The evidence has been made widely available and is seen as a global public good, helping partners, developing country governments and international partners improve the effectiveness of their efforts to prevent VAWG.

Results

The final independent performance evaluation of the programme described What Works as a “game-changer” and concludes that the programme has influenced policy, practice and investment, and has informed the architecture of future programming. What Works has:

- **Pioneered approaches around the world that have reduced VAWG by around 50%.** Over half of the rigorously evaluated pilot programmes have shown significant reductions in violence, demonstrating that VAWG is preventable. Most have achieved multiple secondary effects on outcomes such as food security, earnings and savings, mental health, alcohol use, and gender equitable attitudes. Evidence from the programme has shaped the design of DFID’s bilateral programmes in Malawi and Zimbabwe and has also influenced South Africa’s [National Strategic Plan](#) on VAWG.
- **Generated a considerable body of research.** This research has significantly improved global understanding on the prevalence, risk factors and drivers of violence, what works to prevent it and what makes interventions successful, particularly in contexts of crisis. The programme has also driven innovation and set new global standards and measures, including generating data to help set standards for disability-inclusive VAWG prevention.
- **Strengthened expert capacity.** What Works has built a community of researchers and practitioners with the skills to design and evaluate VAWG prevention interventions, collect and analyse data, and communicate findings to key audiences.

Lessons learnt

In 2021, the United Kingdom will launch the successor programme “What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale” to systematically scale-up proven approaches and generate evidence to improve the global response to preventing VAWG. Key lessons will be applied from the first phase, including:

- **The uptake and use of the evidence must be embedded into research programmes from the outset** rather than after research has been done. Use of political economy analysis and local knowledge, including partnerships with partner country research institutions and local women’s rights organisations, are important to optimise uptake in local contexts.
- **Adequate allocation of resources (staff and funds) and realistic timeframes for capacity building.** Programmes should invest in identifying needs and developing the skills of local researchers working on complex studies such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and to support implementing partners in understanding the research results as they are generated.

- **Learning from what did not work as well as what did work.** As this can be challenging it is important to support organisations in communicating mixed findings and managing sensitivities around interventions that did not show evidence of violence reduction.
- **Relationship building needs time, particularly for equitable practitioner-researcher partnerships.** To avoid any initial tensions and ensure a mutually beneficial relationship, plan for a substantial inception phase, allowing time to build the partnership between the researchers and practitioners.

Further information

FCDO (2020), *What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls: Evaluation management response and project completion review*, <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-203709/documents>.

What Works Programme website resource hub: <https://www.whatworks.co.za>.

ICAI, *DFID's Efforts to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls - A Learning Review*, <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-report/dfids-efforts-eliminate-violence-women-girls>.

OECD resources

OECD, *Gender and development*, <http://www.oecd.org/development/gender-development>.

OECD (2020), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: United Kingdom 2020*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/43b42243-en>.

To learn more about United Kingdom's development co-operation see:

OECD (2021), "United Kingdom", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ff4da321-en>.

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