



## Feminist Pocketbook

### TIP SHEET #4:

## Staying accountable to women and girls

The Coalition of Feminist for Social Change (COFEM), created in 2017 to reassert a feminist perspective in violence against women and girls (VAWG) work, is a collective of activists, academics, and practitioners working globally to end VAWG.

This Tip Sheet is part of COFEM's Feminist Pocketbook. For access to the full Pocketbook, go to: [www.cofemsocialchange.org](http://www.cofemsocialchange.org).

*Tip Sheet 4 addresses accountability — what it is, why it matters and who it concerns. It reflects, and builds on, the key ideas explored in Tip Sheet 2 — that women and girls should be at the centre of all gender-based violence (GBV) programming.*

### Key points

- Being accountable to women and girls means ensuring that our work prioritises the rights and needs of women and girls and does not cause them harm directly or indirectly.
- Accountability requires adopting an intersectional approach within and across all gender-based violence (GBV) programming.
- Building a strong women's rights movement and civil society is crucial to building accountability to women and girls.
- Promoting and supporting women's leadership and decision-making is critical for effective GBV programming, policy, and advocacy, and ensures that GBV work is accountable to women and girls.

### What is accountability to women and girls?

In the context of humanitarian and development work, accountability to women and girls means:

- Promoting and ensuring women and girls' leadership in all work on GBV;
- Learning from and acting on the voices and experiences of diverse women and girls;
- Prioritising the principle of 'do no harm' across all activities, and

- Ensuring that the involvement of men and boys does not disempower or sideline women and girls.

Accountability to women and girls is critical to ethical and effective GBV programming and to securing women and girls' full and equal rights. Taking a feminist approach to accountability also means recognising and actively challenging patriarchal systems and structures that privilege men across all levels (e.g. individual, community, societal and systemic).



## Why does accountability to women and girls matter?

Accountability in GBV work matters because it prioritises and promotes women's leadership, voice and agency on issues that directly impact their lives. Accountability to women and girls is central to the goals of addressing GBV and achieving gender equality. It is a key strategy for transforming the unequal gender-based norms, behaviours and structures that underpin GBV in different contexts.

GBV work that does not prioritise accountability to women and girls can cause direct harm or reinforce unequal power between women and men; it is also contrary to feminist principles. For example, the growing focus on men's engagement in GBV programming has, in some cases, diverted resources away from work with women and girls.<sup>1</sup>

## Guiding principles for ensuring accountability to women and girls

The following principles ensure accountability to women and girls and should be considered in relation to any GBV programming, policy, or advocacy.



### **Prioritise the rights and needs of women and girls:**

All GBV programming, policy and advocacy should be women-centred and focus on meeting the rights and needs of women and girls. This means defining the goals of GBV initiatives in line with women's rights and ensuring that activities improve women's status and do not frame men as victims of gender-based inequality. GBV advocacy, programming, and policy should be developed through women's participation and leadership to ensure their rights and needs are captured.



### **Do no harm:**

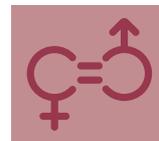
GBV work must be guided by strong ethics and safety principles that prioritise women and girls' safety. This includes identifying and mitigating potential risks during project and policy planning stages, and monitoring implementation to ensure

work to address GBV does not create additional harm or trauma for women and girls. Direct harm can include exposing women to further abuse by a violent partner, creating survivor services that are not confidential, or implementing GBV prevention activities without strong response services in place. Indirect harm can include partnering with agencies that promote unequal or harmful attitudes and behaviours towards women, or that work in ways that reinforce patriarchal systems and structures that facilitate men's power and control over women and girls.



### **Promote women's leadership and inclusion:**

Being accountable means providing avenues for women's active participation and leadership, prioritising their views and knowledge, and responding to their concerns. A key strategy is partnering with women's rights organisations and civil society groups so that GBV initiatives align with the interests of local women's movements. This is particularly important to ensure that GBV work does not directly or indirectly privilege men and boys, which is a risk in several current men's GBV engagement approaches.



### **Actively challenge gender inequality to transform patriarchy:**

All work on GBV should be informed by a strong analysis and understanding of how gender inequality underpins the violence experienced by women and girls in different contexts.<sup>2</sup> Work that does not possess this gender-power analysis or recognise and challenge gender inequality cannot be accountable to women and girls.



### **Address intersecting and multiple forms of oppression:**

Tip Sheet 1 explains how individuals experience multiple, intersecting forms of both privilege and oppression. GBV work needs to be informed by an understanding of how women and girls may experience violence and inequality in different ways.<sup>3</sup> For example, programmes to address GBV within a communi-

<sup>1</sup> See Tip Sheet 6 for more information on the importance of GBV work with men and boys that prioritises accountability to women and girls.

<sup>2</sup> See Tip Sheet 1 for a feminist perspective on GBV work.

<sup>3</sup> Although all women — including transgender women and women of all sexualities — face discrimination in the context of global patriarchy, specific groups of women face multiple forms of oppressions because of their race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background, abilities and sexual orientation, which, in turn, shape their experiences of violence.

ty should be inclusive and accessible to women and girls with disabilities, and should consider how certain groups of women, such as those from ethnic minorities, can be at increased risk of experiencing violence. In this way, the work is accountable to all women and girls, regardless of their ability, sexuality, class, race, etc.

## What does accountability to women and girls look like in practice?

The table below provides some examples of what the guiding principles for accountability to women and girls look like in practice across different GBV work contexts.

Advocacy	Programming	Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women have opportunities to input into, and lead, advocacy platforms for gender equality and anti-violence, including when established by male community leaders or policy-makers.</li> <li>• A strong women's movement is underpinned by women's rights organisations and other civil society organisations. Women's leadership and collaboration within the movement supports pursuit of shared goals and activities that prioritise women's rights and needs.</li> <li>• Women's rights organisations work in partnership with diverse actors, including marginalised women, to address intersecting forms of inequality and oppression.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GBV programmes and evaluations are developed and implemented in partnership with local or national women's rights organisations, and include a component to strengthen partners' organisational skills as may be needed for long-term sustainability and leadership.</li> <li>• Women and girls are included in GBV program design and implementation and evaluations are informed by women's experiences and expressed needs.</li> <li>• Program delivery prioritises the safety and wellbeing of women and girls and does not create risk of additional harm or trauma.</li> <li>• Initiatives with men and boys are informed by feminist principles for GBV work and prioritise accountability to women and girls.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GBV policy-making spaces are safe and supportive environments for women to engage in and lead. Women have space and safety to voice ideas and concerns and are not silenced or sidelined by dominant voices.</li> <li>• Women from diverse and marginalised backgrounds participate in policy development, and their perspectives are incorporated actively into policy decisions and documents.</li> <li>• Women's engagement in GBV policy-making is supported by their strong political representation in national parliaments and ministries and local government bodies.</li> <li>• GBV laws and policies are implemented and enforced in a way that promotes government accountability and women and girl's safety.</li> </ul>

## Practical tips



### Practitioners, researchers, donors and policy-makers

- Engage in continuous reflection and be critically aware of your power and privilege within broad-



er structures and relationships. For example, reflect on potential inequalities in your position and power as a practitioner, researcher, donor and policy-maker vis-à-vis women and girls in the communities where you work. Active-



ly take steps to shift that dynamic by listening and giving up some of the space you have so that women and girls can voice their own ideas, rights and needs more consistently. Seek constructive criticism from women and girls of diverse and marginalised backgrounds to check that you are not directly or indirectly silencing those with less power than yourself.

- Prioritise the safety of women and girls at all stages of a GBV initiative and monitor for unintended consequences that could cause harm or reinforce gender inequality.
- Develop and implement institutional policies and ethical practices that promote gender equality and accountability to women and girls at an organisational level. For example, develop policies on equal representation in management roles; ensure equal pay for women and men; create a flexible and respectful organisational culture that recognises barriers to women’s participation, such as childcare; and run internal workshops to challenge sexist and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.
- Promote and invest in women’s leadership at all levels. Strengthen women’s leadership in households, communities, organisations and governments. Invest in initiatives that change social norms and attitudes that are barriers to women’s leadership, such as beliefs that women do not belong in political spaces and should not hold decision-making positions.
- Build capacity — financial, organisational and technical — of local and national women’s rights organisations to lead advocacy, policy and programming efforts to address GBV and advance women’s rights and gender equality.

- Support women’s rights organisations to connect with broader civil society to strengthen local women’s movements and establish regional networks.

## Practitioners

- Promote women and girls’ meaningful participation in decision-making within community, organisational and government spaces on issues affecting their safety, well-being and rights.
- Involve women at all levels of program design, implementation and evaluation and implement their advice and concerns during each stage.
- Incorporate capacity building into program delivery to enhance sustainability and long-term programming.

## Donors and policy-makers

- Require accountability to women and girls as a necessary and central part of all GBV programming and policy.
- Promote partnerships and networks among actors and organisations doing GBV and women’s rights work so that diverse voices inform efforts and programming, especially in areas with heightened need for accountability, such as male engagement programmes.
- Invest in programmes that have strong accountability measures and ensure funding frameworks prioritise initiatives that are explicit in how they intend to be accountable to women and girls.



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