

**AMPLIFYING THE
VOICES, PRACTICES,
AND
CHALLENGES OF
FEMINIST EFFORTS TO
END GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE (GBV)**





Best practices are already in the communities most affected by GBV

They are rooted in lived realities, locally driven, and they combine care, resistance, and advocacy. Although these prevention strategies are sometimes hidden, this Zine focuses on signposting them, their invisibility, institutionalization, and resourcing.

Voices that shaped this Zine



This zine is a collection of insights from activists across the globe, all united by a commitment to visualize the invisible, locally driven feminist approaches in GBV.

In 2025, COFEM's thematic focus area – localizing feminist approaches in GBV and research working group, in collaboration with partners, convened a joint panel to illuminate feminist approaches to ending GBV.

The panel inspired a follow-up survey to learn more about successful feminist prevention efforts that have worked, why these efforts are not widely recognized, and to brainstorm how local feminist efforts can be resourced, institutionalized, and recognized alongside Western strategies. We received 12 responses from feminists, GBV practitioners, and researchers, and their thoughts and ideas shape the content of this Zine.



The Power of local feminist GBV prevention

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"Most powerful grassroots feminist approaches to GBV prevention have been community-led initiatives that shift power to women and girls themselves. For example, safe spaces for adolescent girls in northern Ghana have created platforms where girls not only learn about their rights but also organize to challenge harmful practices like child marriage and Female Genital Mutiltation (FGM)"- Blessilla Na-afae Kandoh

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Feminist-informed dialogue

In several communities in Ghana, when women's groups lead these conversations, sharing survivor stories, presenting data, and demanding accountability, it creates cultural legitimacy for change and challenges patriarchal norms at their roots.



Partnering for resistance

When grassroots feminist groups partner with broader social justice actors, they amplify their voices, gain protection against backlash, and push for structural reforms that extend beyond project cycles. These approaches work because they are rooted in lived realities, driven by women themselves, and they combine care, resistance, and advocacy.



Examples of powerful local and grassroots feminist approaches in GBV prevention that have worked and should be more visible globally.



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“Community-building and experience/knowledge sharing have been the best form of solidarity, support and source of innovation. For example, women journalists collaborate with domestic violence experts and digital rights advocates to fill gaps in building awareness and generating a shared advocacy response, which has been a meaningful counter to Big Tech power in our field,”- Jennifer Adams



Data-driven Feminist Advocacy.

Grassroots researchers translate women's lived experiences into evidence that influences public policy. By documenting the social and economic costs of violence, these efforts highlight how GBV affects not only individuals but also the broader development of communities and economies.

GBV Evidence-Based Prevention Methodologies, such as SASA, have proven effective in preventing violence.

In Technology-Facilitated GBV, bystander intervention serves as both an intervention and an empowerment practice. It uses community-building, experience, and knowledge sharing to foster support and innovation. E.g, women journalists collaborating with experts and digital rights advocates boost community members' confidence to intervene in GBV incidents, creating shared advocacy and solidarity from within the community.



Every Day Feminist Education builds awareness and solidarity within the community through dialogue circles, storytelling, and peer learning. Women engage men on issues of gender inequality.

Feminist assessments drive the coordination of different GBV humanitarian responses

Intersectional activism plays a vital role in making prevention efforts more inclusive. It recognizes different ways VAWG manifests and expands the understanding of who is vulnerable and why.



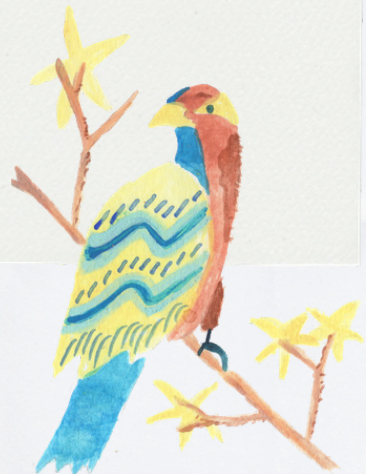
Across regions, especially in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, locally and grassroots-led feminist GBV prevention practices exist, creating systems change, influencing policy discussions, and shifting cultural norms. Examples include locally led practices that combine income generation with prevention messaging, thereby sustaining both dignity and economic independence.

These are the power of local feminist approaches. Women's solidarity networks and local feminist collectives play key roles in raising awareness about GBV, particularly in smaller communities where violence against women and girls is often silenced. In such areas, support networks of market women, fisherwomen, and domestic workers created by local women's groups helped survivors access information, legal aid, and emotional support in a safe and understanding environment.

These initiatives are frequently volunteer-driven and built on trust, making them accessible to survivors who might not easily approach official institutions.

There is also the use of arts and social media by grassroots feminists to challenge sexist attitudes and normalize conversations about consent, equality, and respect. Local feminist festivals are used by young activists and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to provide spaces for discussion and empowerment.

Community participation is essential for breaking down harmful gender norms, collaborating with religious organizations and community leaders to prevent patriarchal doctrines that oppress women and girls, creating safe spaces where they are believed in without judgment, and establish support networks for victims to avoid feeling isolated during their processes.



Work Remains Hidden



In a world of mass production,
I find solace in feminist wonders.

- Unknown

Despite sufficient evidence and the obvious successful outcome of feminist approaches in GBV prevention work, it remains under-recognized.

The invisibility of these works is *enabled* by a lack of formal documentation, language/framing, and a persistent bias that are further, *undoubtedly*, rooted in systemic and structural colonial, racist, Eurocentric, and capitalist global aid and policy frameworks.

Feminist practices are highly effective because they are **community-owned/led**, **context-specific**, and **relational**.

The absence of **formal documentation** means these efforts are often overlooked, even though they are shifting norms at the community level and reinforcing the idea that feminist local approaches are “informal” or secondary rather than central to prevention.

Language and framing can add another barrier, as community leaders and women’s groups may not speak the policy jargon that global spaces expect, even though their work is powerful and evidence-based in practice.

Persistent bias that sees Western or externally designed interventions as more rigorous or scalable, while local feminist solutions are treated as context-specific.



Applying **Eurocentric solutions** to the Global South's problems can sometimes fall flat. It alienates the priority partners from the processes.

The GBV field benefits from feminist grassroots organizing, yet credits the **Global North** for prevention work, especially in research.

Grassroots actors are severely **underfunded**. The work they do are not elevated to compare with the work International Nonprofits do.

Most grassroots actors are **unable to engage** in spaces where they can speak and be recognized for their work.

Bigger INGOs **co-opt** grassroots feminist approaches in the name of collaboration, sometimes taking away space and credit from local feminist innovators.



"Much local feminist GBV work is done with limited resources. Global efforts favor large organizations with measurable results, while grassroots efforts focus on relationships and community change, which are harder to quantify but impactful. Language and power imbalances, with global discussions in English led by the Global North, hinder local voices from smaller or non-English-speaking countries from participating or gaining recognition.." -

Maria Faita

"Local feminist practices often need a structural shift. My experience shows that many international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations are reluctant to change, especially when resources are limited and political pressure is high. Structural racism, colonial bias, and Western dominance persist, undermining efforts to support local knowledge and practice." -

Jennifer Adams.

"Global GBV prefers measurable outputs and scalable models, which can overlook the deeply relational and context-specific nature of local feminist work. Language barriers, limited access to international advocacy spaces, and power imbalances in donor relationships further marginalise these voices." - Sheistah Bundhoo-Deenoo

"Less known, their added value is not recognized,"
Fulvia Boniardi

"Local feminist knowledge is mostly oral, experiential, and community-based, not expressed in formal academic or donor-approved language. These approaches often use storytelling, collective decision-making, and traditional justice, which don't align with Western evidence standards. As a result, important local data and lessons may be missed or not recorded."- Nathalie Martin

Resource, recognize and foster the sustainability of local feminist GBV prevention practices

Ensuring that these approaches are recognized and supported without erasing the autonomy, flexibility, and political character that make them effective is paramount.

This is because local feminist efforts embody lived realities, cultural understanding, and trust. When they are recognized as innovative solutions, prevention becomes more meaningful and sustainable.

DONORS



- **Can invest** in mentorship and capacity building to strengthen prevention practices without erasing feminist identity and values.
- **Prioritize** direct, flexible funding that allows urgent response and adaptation to community needs.



INGOs, along with Global North actors

- Need to **step back** and make space for grassroots organizing, be aware of their privileges, and ensure they do not take more space or block resources for feminist practices.
- **Appreciate** the rich, diverse plethora of practices and integrated global narratives.
- **Highlight** local feminist prevention practices with a clear focus, build horizontal partnerships, and celebrate feminist ingenuity.

Researchers



- **Broaden** evaluation frameworks to include storytelling, collective testimony, and traditional knowledge as valid forms of data. Co-developing indicators with community actors ensures that what is measured truly reflects what matters locally.

- **Incorporate** a decolonized and feminist lens into learning and evaluation, and codify lived experience and local knowledge as the baseline for measuring progress.
- **Embed** feminist research and practice within local universities and policy bodies, ensuring sustainability beyond donor cycles. Recognition should come through shared authorship, fair resource allocation, and platforms that amplify community narratives as evidence of meaningful change.



Remember!



These may not always fit the conventional "program model," but they change mindsets in ways that legislation and top-down campaigns sometimes cannot." - Blessilla Na-afoe Kandoh

In northern Ghana, through the KASA initiative, women's groups and youth coalitions use storytelling, intergenerational dialogue, and faith-based conversations to challenge harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Localizing feminist approaches in gender-based violence prevention work requires us to trust and invest in the everyday innovations of women and girls in communities!!!





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