SAFETY FIRST | Operational Guidance

How to leverage social safety nets to prevent Gender Based Violence

THE CHALLENGE

Gender-based violence (GBV) has substantial individual and collective costs that disproportionately affect poorer women and girls. One woman in three worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence revealing a ‘shadow pandemic’ of large proportions. In addition to harming those directly affected, GBV is a drain on human capital development, poverty reduction, and growth. Up to 3.7 percent of gross domestic product can be lost annually due to GBV—about the amount most developing countries spend on primary education. GBV also undermines the core objectives of social safety nets (SSNs) by eroding human capital, productivity, and well-being, as well as by increasing women and children’s vulnerability. While reducing GBV is not necessarily an objective of most SSNs, many programs are already empowering women and reducing the prevalence of violence against women and children. SSNs have the potential to contribute even more systematically to the reduction of GBV at scale given their broad reach in many countries. Simple adjustments in program design and delivery can amplify the role of SSNs in GBV prevention.

THE OPPORTUNITY

A growing body of research has demonstrated that SSNs overwhelmingly contribute to reductions in intimate partner violence as well as harsh treatment and violence against children. However, aggregate data can mask heterogenous impacts on subgroups based on household member characteristics (such as levels of education, age gaps between partners, or substance abuse), differences in household structures (such as between polygamous and monogamous families, or between nuclear and multigenerational households) and in different settings such as in very conservative communities or in conflict-affected areas. It is very important therefore to investigate the gender dynamics in different beneficiary groups for each individual program setting.

THEORY OF CHANGE

There are three direct pathways through which SSNs are thought to reduce the prevalence of IPV and other forms of GBV overall including: (a) reductions in poverty and food insecurity, (b) empowerment of women when they are designated recipients of transfers, and (c) increasing women’s social capital through participation in program activities or as transfer recipients. The first poverty

KEY MESSAGES

1. GBV is a drain on human capital
2. Safety nets are already reducing GBV
3. There are opportunities to do more at each stage of the delivery chain

DEFINITIONS

Gender-based violence (GBV) includes physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm inflicted, in public or in private, because of person's gender. Globally, women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing GBV; however, men and boys may also experience GBV. Those whose sexual orientation or gender identity does not conform to social and cultural norms, also face significant risks of GBV.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to violence committed by a current or former spouse or partner in an intimate relationship. While IPV can be experienced by men, the majority of IPV is committed against women, particularly the most extreme forms that lead to serious injury and death. IPV is the most common form of domestic violence, although the latter also includes violence against other household members, such as children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

SSN program actors typically include direct project workers, contracted workers and service providers, and community workers (paid or voluntary). They also include private actors, such as employers, firms, or intermediaries, that receive an incentive to hire program beneficiaries or provide them with any other benefit.
reduction pathway is expected to reduce the risks of IPV in almost all cases, while there can be backlash against the second and third pathways of women's empowerment and increased social capital—but this can be mitigated through careful program design. There is also a fourth, indirect intergenerational pathway through which the increased human capital of women and children reduces the risk to girls of experiencing IPV during their lifetime. Additionally, as in any program, there may be safety considerations for beneficiaries while travelling two and from program activities. It is also important to assess risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, or sexual harassment of either beneficiaries or program workers.

**Program Impact Pathways**

- **Reduced poverty and food insecurity**
  - Reduced poverty-related stress
  - Reduced negative coping mechanisms
  - Increased emotional well-being

- **Women's empowerment**
  - Increased access to and control over resources
  - Increased bargaining power and status in household
  - Increased self-esteem
  - Risk of backlash to shift in balance of power/challenges to male authority

- **Increased social capital**
  - Strengthened social networks
  - Increased status and visibility in the community
  - Risk of backlash if women are perceived to transgress social norms

- **Intergenerational impacts**
  - Women's increased human capital
  - Increased levels of girls' education
  - Decreased early marriage and pregnancy

**SOCIAL PROTECTION DELIVERY CHAIN**

The Safety First Operational Guidance Note highlights opportunities to empower women and reduce GBV, as well as mitigate any risk, all along the social protection delivery chain. It’s designed to allow readers to dip in and out for guidance on whatever specific area is of interest.
KEY QUESTIONS

Each section begins with a set of key questions to help teams think through how design choices could leverage the potential of their program to empower women and prevent GBV. For example, during outreach, teams are encouraged to reflect on how program objectives, whether or not they include women’s empowerment or GBV, can be communicated in a way that promotes women’s participation while avoiding risks of backlash, for example, through ‘labelling’ of women’s participation as bringing benefits to the entire household. At the same time, culturally sensitive ‘nudges’ to encourage greater balance in gender relations can also be skillfully integrated into program outreach communications. During enrollment, teams are encouraged to ask whether women are disadvantaged by proof of identity requirements and to think of opportunities to close gender gaps, for example, by facilitating women’s civil registration. When considering digital payments to provide benefits, key questions facilitate the assessment of whether women have access to the necessary technology, such as cellphones or bank cards, and if there is a need to strengthen their financial or digital literacy. When setting up structures to manage SSNs, key questions to ask are whether codes or conduct and grievance mechanisms are already in place and sufficient, whether they need to be strengthened, or whether new codes and mechanisms need to be introduced through the program.

The Note then walks readers through a series of decision trees to help them consider both GBV risks and prevention opportunities linked to different design choices—such as for designing payment modalities in the example below. GBV considerations can then be inputs into final program decisions where teams are often balancing competing objectives and implementation constraints. “Good Practice” and “Evidence Boxes” appear throughout the Note providing information on what has worked in different settings. New evidence from research and practice is constantly emerging and the Safety First initiative aims at continuous updating, welcoming inputs from practitioners and researchers alike.
Payment Modality Decision Tree

Opportunities
- Contact between program actors and beneficiaries provides opportunities to deliver accompanying measures at the same moment
- Accessible to women with limited digital and financial literacy
- Inclusive of beneficiaries without ID cards and those living in remote locations

Risks
- Travel-related risks
- SEA risks (by payment agents)
- Cash may be more easily extracted through the use or the threat of violence
- Difficult access for the elderly, persons with disability, remote groups, etc.

Mitigation
- Designate safe and accessible transfer points and facilitate safe transportation
- Strict oversight of manual transfers

Opportunities
- Increase financial inclusion
- Increase control over the use of resources
- Increased confidentiality of transactions
- Opportunity to build digital and financial literacy

Risks
- Difficulty for women with limited digital and financial literacy to understand and access virtual cash
- Potentially longer distances to pay points; need to take public transportation, which may expose women to GBV

Mitigation
- Assistance in setting up bank or postal accounts or mobile wallets
- Financial literacy training

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION TIPS

Each section concludes with a set of design and implementation tips. Not all tips are specifically GBV-focused but often simply smart design and implementation tips to help programs better respond to the gender-specific needs of beneficiaries. Strengthening overall program impacts in this way can already bring positive spillover effects on women’s empowerment and GBV prevention. Where there is interest and opportunity to engage more directly on women’s empowerment and GBV prevention, the Note also provides guidance on what are promising entry points—from low-hanging fruits to more intensive engagements. Combating GBV requires a multi-sectoral approach, so while SSNs can be leveraged to empower women and help prevent GBV, they are not expected to address all aspects of the challenge—the most impactful engagements for GBV prevention link SSNs activities to other efforts.

SSNs are implemented across a huge range of contexts. The drivers of GBV, appetite for engaging on GBV issues, and capacity constraints vary significantly across countries. Therefore, design and implementation tips are not one size-fits-all solutions but rather options and approaches that have been shown to be promising in different settings. Context matters and it is important to assess the social and economic drivers of GBV and of GBV prevention in each program setting to be able to design programs that strengthen positive and limit the possibility of negative impacts. The tips additionally integrate the World Bank’s Environmental and Social Framework requirements related to sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment so teams can find guidance on both, thus leveraging the potential of SSNs as well as meeting corporate requirements.

The full Safety First: Operational Guidance Note was prepared by Ioana Botea, Aline Coudouel, Alessandra Heinemann, and Stephanie Kuttner and is available at http://hdl.handle.net/10986/35641.