OVERVIEW

Fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) create a web of interconnected challenges for women and girls. Violent conflicts and high levels of institutional and social fragility affect the quality of policy and institutions, including government capacity to protect basic rights and deliver essential services. Entrenched harmful social norms fuel gender-based violence (GBV), further jeopardizing women and girls’ safety and well-being. While men and boys are also exposed to violence and pressures linked to masculinity, women bear the brunt of inequality manifested in higher rates of GBV, economic hardship, and limited mobility.

Crises can also create openings for positive change. Opportunities arise to reconfigure social norms, empower women through new roles and responsibilities, and address discriminatory patterns during post-conflict reconstruction.

The attainment of gender equality outcomes is intricately linked to an understanding of and engagement with the policy arena, which in FCV settings is often marked by weak formal institutions and influential non-state actors. These institutional breakdowns compound obstacles for gender equality, disproportionately affecting women and girls through family disruptions, displacement, increased violence, poverty, and limited access to essential services and economic opportunities. Achieving gender equality in FCV settings necessitates articulating, mediating, and legitimizing solutions within the policy arena, notably tailoring solutions across different situations of fragility, conflict and violence. It requires a comprehensive understanding of the political, cultural, and power dynamics shaping the policy arena in each specific FCV context.

World Bank Group experience in improving gender outcomes in FCV settings shows promise, but achieving sustainable and scalable change is a complex and ongoing process. Evidence on what works in FCV settings remains thin, but experience suggests that promising approaches include forging partnerships to deliver essential services to protect human capital; enabling women’s access to economic opportunities to enhance their resilience; sustaining commitment and financial resources; engaging women as leaders and agents of change to promote stability and peace; strengthening laws and regulations for gender equality; influencing attitudes, behaviors, and norms through engaging with formal and informal institutions, including with men and boys; and understanding the intersectionality of vulnerabilities in FCV to inform solutions.

Recommendations for governments, development partners, and the private sector are centered on a shared commitment to work in FCV settings to reduce poverty and boost shared prosperity. Increased investment and collaboration are needed to build evidence on effective interventions, understand the policy arena, strengthen national government systems, adapt to emerging challenges like the intersection of climate and conflict, innovate in data collection, prioritize gender equality in country engagement, and increase efforts to prevent and respond to GBV. Adapting operations in FCV settings relies on partnerships between state actors, non-governmental organizations, and development partners to achieve sustainable results in advancing gender outcomes.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY ARENA IN FCV SETTINGS</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal institutions, norms, and behaviors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENDER OUTCOMES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FCV SETTINGS</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMPROVING GENDER OUTCOMES IN FCV: LESSONS FROM WORLD BANK GROUP ENGAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Forge partnerships to deliver basic services</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Enable women's access to economic opportunities</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sustain commitment and financial resources</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Engage women as leaders to promote stability and peace</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Apply laws and regulations for gender equality</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Influence informal institutions, attitudes, behaviors, and norms</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Understand the intersectionality of vulnerabilities in FCV</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This thematic policy note is part of a series that provides an analytical foundation for the new World Bank Gender Strategy 2024-2030. The thematic note series seeks to give a broad overview of the latest research and findings on gender equality outcomes and summarises key thematic issues, evidence on promising solutions, operational good practices, and key areas for future engagement on promoting gender equality and empowerment. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work are entirely those of the author(s). They do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank or its Board of Directors.

This policy note is complementary to the Approach Paper “A Development Approach to Advancing Gender Engagement and Closing Gender Gaps in Fragile, Conflict and Violent Situations” prepared by the WBG’s FCV Group to support WBG task teams with the implementation of the WBG’s FCV Strategy (2020-25). Together, the two papers and the Action Plan of the Approach Paper support the implementation the Gender Strategy.

This policy note was prepared by Lucia Hanmer, Uche Ekhator-Mobayode, Afrah Al Ahmadi, and Laura Rawlings. The authors thank Laura Montes for excellent research assistance and Ellen Maynes and Joanna Kate Blackman for their insightful peer review. Helpful inputs and comments were received from Diana Arango, Doreen Kibuka-Musoke, Elena Bardasi, Manuel Contreras Urbina, Michael Woolcock, Sarah Haddock, Varalakshmi Vemuru, Verena Phipps, Victoria Stanley, and Xavier Devictor. We express our gratitude to our colleague at IRC, Helena Minchew for her valuable feedback. Lastly, the authors thank Leslie Ashby and Saman Rejali for providing excellent editorial assistance and Sundas Liaqat for her support in the final revisions.
INTRODUCTION

By 2030, more than half of the world’s extreme poor will live in countries characterized by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) (World Bank 2020e). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, 20 million more people are now living in extreme poverty in FCV countries (World Bank 2023c). Ongoing and new conflicts have caused record numbers to flee their homes. As of mid-2023, 110 million people were displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and/or events disturbing the public order (UNHCR 2023). Three-quarters of forcibly displaced people live in low and middle-income countries, often hosted by communities that are struggling to have their own needs met. Displacement has specific impacts on population groups experiencing various forms of marginalization, especially women, children, youth, and people with disabilities.

Gender inequalities are magnified in FCV settings. As shown in Figure 1, maternal mortality rates are the highest in the world and women and girls are least able globally to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive rights and health. Additionally, the gender gap against girls in access to secondary education is large in FCV settings and few women have access to financial services. More generally women and girls face barriers in access to social services and economic opportunities as they assume increased responsibilities as household heads and caregivers. In many countries, food insecurity is both a cause and consequence of fragility and conflict, with women and girls disproportionately affected. For example, in Afghanistan, since the Taliban took over in August 2021, women-led households are more food insecure than those led by men, 96 percent versus 89 percent (WFP 2022). In many countries, social norms often mean that women and girls eat last and less. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender gaps, reducing gains in women and girl’s empowerment and agency (IEG 2023). Increases in FCV risks are eroding progress made on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including reducing poverty and promoting shared prosperity.
The compound challenges in FCV settings call for policies and programs tailored to specific geographies and a conflict-sensitive approach to operations to achieve gender equality outcomes (World Bank 2020e). Each FCV context is unique, yet they have common structural characteristics that make gender equality outcomes harder to achieve. These include weak institutions and rule of law; increased market failures; and conflict-related changes in household composition, household decision making, and the household’s gender division of labor. In many FCV settings, formal institutions have little capacity, lack legitimacy, and are unable to deliver services that are foundational for gender equality. Informal institutions, such as social norms, customs, and traditions, also pose challenges to gender equality. Conflict and violence often result in the breakdown of social structures and the rule of law. This, in turn, reinforces harmful gender norms, contributing to increased inequality and GBV. Market failures constrain employment and economic opportunities, exacerbating gender-based barriers, such as labor market discrimination, and barriers created by gender gaps in access to assets, financial services, technology, education, and skills.
UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY ARENA IN FCV SETTINGS

Gender equality outcomes are mediated through the policy arena. The policy arena is the space where actors and stakeholders interact and negotiate agreements that shape formal and informal institutions. Interaction between actors in the policy arena shapes opportunities and power dynamics. While each FCV situation is distinct and dependent on the type and level of fragility, conflict and violence (World Bank 2020e), the policy arena in these settings is characterized by weak formal institutions, including legal systems, public sector agencies, and markets. In some settings, non-state actors and groups holding power such as militias or other armed forces play a large role in shaping opportunities and imposing sanctions.

Breakdowns at various levels of formal institutions interact, compounding barriers to gender equality. In FCV settings women and girls are disproportionately impacted by family breakdown and displacement, increased interpersonal violence, poverty, and lack of access to basic services (IEG 2023) and economic opportunities.

Durable society-wide resolutions to improve gender equality outcomes and forge opportunities in FCV settings must be articulated, mediated, and legitimized through the policy arena. Actors seeking to address these challenges must invest the necessary time to understand the political and cultural factors shaping the policy arena in a given FCV context. This includes understanding power dynamics and the influence of actors on attitudes toward and the treatment of women and girls. At the heart of the FCV setting are complex interactions between often weak formal institutions and a range of informal institutions.

Formal institutions

Weak governance systems, lack of legitimate and credible government, limited state capacity, and lack of effective and inclusive political processes in FCV settings impede the ability of formal institutions to respond to the demands of citizens and meet their basic needs (DFID 2005, World Bank 2011). Weak institutions are both a cause and effect of conflict, and while they have negative impacts for all, there are specific implications for women and girls. Specific institutional challenges in FCV settings include low national and/or local government capacity, a lack of institutional legitimacy where the state is present, exclusion of women (and other socially excluded groups) from decision-making positions of power and authority, and inability to deliver basic services, including those needed for foundational human endowments that are pre-conditions for gender equality (World Bank 2011; World Bank 2012).

Women’s voice and agency have an important role in institutional strengthening within FCV settings. For instance, women’s engagement in peace processes is associated with long-lasting agreements and greater satisfaction with the outcomes (O’Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz 2015; Paffenholz 2015; Paffenholz et al. 2017; Stone 2015; UN Women 2015). Development and peacebuilding institutions often mobilize women and women’s organizations to promote peace, drawing on their roles as connectors and trust builders (United Nations; World Bank. 2018).

---

Ongoing conflicts, political instability, and weakened governance structures can disrupt or severely limit the provision of essential services in FCV settings. Disruptions to health care, education, social protection, and other basic services and infrastructure, like water and sanitation, have profound and adverse effects on women and girls, creating risks, increasing vulnerabilities, and exacerbating already challenging circumstances. For example, the breakdown of health care services hampers maternal and reproductive health support, placing pregnant women at greater risk during childbirth and limiting access to family planning services. Education is frequently disrupted, disproportionately affecting girls, often due to fear for their safety and/or strained family resources, coupled with unfavorable gender norms that prioritize boys’ education. Displacement and economic instability further marginalize women, limiting their access to livelihood opportunities.

Effective delivery of basic services requires transformative approaches that promote gender equality and violence prevention from the outset, especially to address the gender norms that drive family and community decision making. Collaboration with local communities and building trust are crucial, as is expanding partnerships among governments, donors, humanitarian actors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including those led by women. Drawing on the comparative advantage of each partner can enable gender transformative service delivery models.

The breakdown of laws and regulations in FCV settings can harm women and deepen gender inequality. The breakdown of legal systems and institutions increases women’s vulnerability to violence, including GBV, as they face limited access to protection, redress, or support. This breakdown also restricts women’s access to economic opportunities, as harmful social norms take precedence, thus constraining women’s asset ownership, mobility, and labor participation. Women’s access to essential social services, such as reproductive health and education, is also impacted.

Women Business and the Law (WBL, 2022) finds that, out of 27 low-income economies examined, 11 economies with the lowest WBL scores are also fragile and conflict-affected situations. The legal frameworks that protect women and girls’ rights may be absent in FCV settings. For example, in the case of Afghanistan, successive bans imposed by the Taliban to limit women’s access to education, sexual and reproductive health services, and employment opportunities have virtually erased half of the population’s rights. Women and girls’ roles in society are restricted as are their agency and growth opportunities. In the absence of effective legal frameworks and law enforcement, GBV tends to rise. This includes physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women and girls. The lack of legal protection can lead to impunity for perpetrators.

Market failures that lead to economically inefficient allocation of resources characterize the policy arena in FCV settings. Many such market failures disproportionately affect women and girls, by restricting their ability to engage in economic activities. Barriers are particularly high to women’s labor market participation and economic opportunities in agriculture and food supply chains, where women play a key role as farmers, producers, and traders. Women’s responsibility for food production in conflict settings often increases as wars divert male labor from agriculture (World Bank 2021a). However, evidence shows that, systematically, women farmers have less access to input and output markets, labor, information, and finance; and they are subject to ingrained norms and institutional barriers that further reduce their negotiation power (Ajema et al 2022). Weak and failing institutions mean property rights are often not enforced in FCV settings and can be discriminatory towards women (World Bank 2011, World Bank 2020a).

Informal institutions, norms, and behaviors

Breakdowns in the social fabric, which frequently accompany conflict and fragility, mean that adverse gender norms are typically entrenched and amplified in FCV settings. At the household level, there are often changes in structure and composition in response to FCV. One frequently observed outcome is the increased number of female-headed households (Buvinic et al 2013). During conflict, household splitting is a common response. Often women, children and older or more vulnerable family member leave first and men and older boys remain behind. Households may become more dependent on women’s earnings if labor market access is more restricted for men and/or men and boys are absent from households. At the same time, women and girls are expected to maintain their existing domestic duties, increasing the demand on their time.

Gender inequalities in FCV relate to issues of masculinity. Gender norms call the identities of men and boys directly into question and they are likely to be involved in and/or directly affected by armed violence and other conflict related acts of violence. Engaging men and boys is crucial to change gender norms that shape gender identities, roles, and power relations (OECD 2019a).

GENDER OUTCOMES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FCV SETTINGS

Conflict and crises generate constraints, but they can also create opportunities for women and girls’ empowerment. In times of crisis, social norms play out within a new space, opening up the possibility of alternative social interactions. These can lead to opportunities for women and men to take on new responsibilities and shape new gender roles and identities (Le Masson et al 2016). Post-conflict reconstruction
is also an opportunity for governments to address patterns of discrimination and renegotiate the social contract (World Bank Group 2020; World Bank 2019a), and for donors and humanitarian actors to mobilize resources to address patterns of discrimination, including gender inequalities (OECD 2020).

The risk of exposure to interpersonal violence and GBV is exacerbated in FCV settings, particularly for women and girls. Besides being a violation of human rights, violence against women and girls limits their agency and negatively impacts children, families, and communities, thus restricting everyone’s capacity to build pathways out of fragility. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most prevalent form of GBV against women and girls in FCV settings. Violence against gender and sexual minorities and GBV is corrosive and a violation of human rights. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are also highly vulnerable to discrimination and violence in FCV settings (World Bank, 2020d).

Violence against children and GBV are strongly correlated. Evidence shows that IPV and child maltreatment co-occur, resulting in intergenerational impacts of IPV (Arango et al 2021) and in negative health, behavior, and educational outcomes for children (Glass et al 2020). Complex links connect IPV, violence against children, interpersonal violence, and the social and political conflicts that drive fragility. More knowledge is needed about how to address GBV, interpersonal violence, and violence against children holistically.

Gender inequality in FCV impacts men and boys, often driven by norms surrounding masculinity. In conflict settings, boys and young men are more likely than girls and women to die or suffer physical and psychological trauma as a consequence of voluntarily or involuntarily engagement in combat operations (Buvinic et al, 2013). While the perpetrators of violence (including intimate partners) are predominantly male as are members of violent extremist groups, gangs, and the militia, the consensus is that men and boys create violent personas because of social, cultural, and political expectations and pressure put on them (Paffenholz et al. 2017). Ideals of masculinity can be used to humiliate and disempower men and boys (Buvinic et al, 2013), who can be affected by discrimination and violence if they do not conform to the dominant model of masculinity.

Damaged infrastructure, insecurity, and increased GBV risks make it difficult for women to get their products to market. Women’s time constraints (due to unpaid domestic and care work), limitations on mobility outside the home, lack of safe transport, and, in some situations, prohibitive gender norms restrict women’s ability to access economic opportunities. Furthermore, the formal private sector is typically small in FCV settings, with high barriers to entry for women who are underrepresented, particularly at the management level (World Bank 2011, Word Bank 2020a). The private sector has an important role to play in improving women’s market access in these settings, especially for opportunities beyond the agricultural sector. From FY15 to date, IFC has invested about US$2.2 billion in infrastructure projects in FCV countries.

Evidence on what works to accelerate gender equality in FCV settings is scarce. Impact evaluations are growing but require further investment. Geographic coverage of impact evaluations is also highly uneven. Of the countries on the World Bank’s FCS list, Afghanistan (12), DRC (15), and Burundi (8) have the most completed impact evaluations. There are no systematic reviews of evidence on what works for women’s empowerment that are drawn from FCS countries or FCV settings alone. Sonnenfeld et al’s (2020) review of the evidence on interventions that aim to build peaceful societies finds that evidence is concentrated in a few areas (mental health and psychosocial support makes up a third of the evidence base) and there are a number of areas where primary evidence has not yet been synthesized.
IMPROVING GENDER OUTCOMES IN FCV: LESSONS FROM WORLD BANK GROUP ENGAGEMENT

In all FCV settings, the World Bank Group seeks to accelerate progress on eliminating GBV, elevating human capital, enabling more and better economic opportunities, and engaging women as leaders (World Bank Group 2024-30 Gender Strategy). Empowering women in FCV settings can help prevent future conflict and ameliorate the disproportionate impacts of armed conflict on women and girls (World Bank 2020e). It is necessary to shift engagement in FCV settings so women and girls are supported not just as a vulnerable group, but also as agents of change who can help catalyze the changes needed in communities and institutions to break out of cycles of conflict, fragility, and violence. Accelerating progress on gender equality is also part of addressing drivers of fragility and conflict, such as conflicts over natural resources resulting from climate shocks. Women’s participation and leadership in climate action are associated with better management of natural resources, conservation outcomes, and disaster preparedness.

The empowerment of women, girls, and people discriminated against based on sexual orientation and gender identity requires long-term engagement and investments that transform gender norms and address barriers to gender outcomes. Yet, often immediate needs for basic services, food security, human security, and social safety nets take precedence. Weak institutional and implementation capacity can create tensions between emergency responses and investments in conflict prevention and longer-term development and poverty reduction (IEG 2023).

World Bank Group experience reveals seven actions that development partners, governments, and other stakeholders can take to help advance gender equality in FCV settings. Actions include forging partnerships to deliver basic services, enabling women’s access to economic opportunities, sustaining commitment and financial resources, engaging women as leaders, applying laws and regulations, influencing informal institutions and norms, and understanding the intersectionality of vulnerabilities.

1. Forge partnerships to deliver basic services

In FCV settings providing essential services and social protection is often at the forefront of World Bank Group engagement. High-risk levels, uncertainty, and fluidity associated with fragile settings call for a mixed, innovative, agile, and adaptable portfolio (Word Bank, 2022). Delivering services in FCV is challenging because of the breakdown of institutions, laws, and regulations and markets. Addressing gender inequality in such settings requires context-specific, people-centric and out-of-the-box approaches to ensure critical services reach all

---

3 Systematic reviews are considered to be the best source of evidence for policy-related decisions making (see 3ie guidance on using evidence gap maps, https://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/how-to-read-egm-document-top.pdf).

4 3ie has an ongoing systematic review that focuses on the effectiveness of interventions around strengthening women’s empowerment, gender equality, and the role of women as agents of change in fragile contexts. https://www.3ieimpact.org/blogs/systematic-approach-building-evidence-base-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-fragile
in need, including women and girls, and lift barriers and create gender transformative change. World Bank supported social protection programs increasingly follow a system approach to balance immediate needs with building the medium to long-term resilience of households and institutions.

The World Bank Group works with partners to meet immediate needs while delivering services to close gender gaps. The protracted and complex nature of FCV settings requires coordination across partners within the humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, private, and government sectors. Strategic partnerships take advantage of each group’s competencies in addressing the effects and drivers of violence and conflict. The World Bank’s FCV Strategy underscores the utility of scaled-up engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) at the country and local level in FCV settings, particularly those operating in insecure areas and in proximity to vulnerable and marginalized communities, and those that are women-led and promote women and girls’ empowerment.

From 2015 to 2022, Yemen experienced a protracted conflict that resulted in extensive damage and a severe humanitarian crisis. The conflict forced 4 million people to flee their homes, with 3.25 million people suffering from acute malnutrition and 5 million at risk of famine. Additionally, 16.2 million people faced food insecurity due to war damage, which disrupted the production, storage, and distribution of food and goods.

In response to the political and security crisis, the World Bank canceled its portfolio in Yemen in 2015, but the very next year, the Bank established a new model of partnership with UN agencies to leverage their in-country presence and experience operating in active conflict settings. This led to the launch of the Emergency Crisis Response Project (ECRP) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and later expanded to include the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

This approach built on the World Bank’s long-standing relationships with local Yemeni institutions rooted in community-based service delivery. They proved resilient and fairly independent from political pressures throughout the crisis. The project engaged local institutions, such as the crisis response programs increasingly follow a system approach to balance immediate needs with building the medium to long-term resilience of households and institutions.

In Yemen, a partnership with the United Nations (UN), local service delivery institutions, and the private sector enabled the World Bank to deliver urgent services to vulnerable populations, including women and girls, at a time when the World Bank did not have a physical presence in-country and could not work directly with government institutions. The Emergency Crisis Response Project (ECRP) combined a people-centered approach to service delivery that preserved the capacity of local actors to respond to immediate needs with a focus on longer-term resilience building to enable recovery when at peace. Partnership between the UN agencies and local service delivery institutions gave access to most of the territory and enabled engagement with local authorities and communities across the country, regardless of the warring party in control of the territory. Empowering women and girls, meeting their immediate needs, and narrowing gender gaps in human capital and economic opportunities were central to the response (Box 1).

**BOX 1: YEMEN EMERGENCY CRISIS RESPONSE PROJECT**

From 2015 to 2022, Yemen experienced a protracted conflict that resulted in extensive damage and a severe humanitarian crisis. The conflict forced 4 million people to flee their homes, with 3.25 million people suffering from acute malnutrition and 5 million at risk of famine. Additionally, 16.2 million people faced food insecurity due to war damage, which disrupted the production, storage, and distribution of food and goods.

In response to the political and security crisis, the World Bank canceled its portfolio in Yemen in 2015, but the very next year, the Bank established a new model of partnership with UN agencies to leverage their in-country presence and experience operating in active conflict settings. This led to the launch of the Emergency Crisis Response Project (ECRP) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and later expanded to include the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

This approach built on the World Bank’s long-standing relationships with local Yemeni institutions rooted in community-based service delivery. They proved resilient and fairly independent from political pressures throughout the crisis. The project engaged local institutions, such as the

World Bank Group projects use entry points across different sectors to strengthen local institutions and women’s leadership capacity within them. For example, in Burkina Faso, the Decentralized Forest and Woodland Management Project developed the capacity of communities and local institutions, such as women’s and farmer’s grassroots organizations, to sustainably manage forests and foster women’s voice, agency, and economic empowerment. Women accounted for 48 percent of project beneficiaries, and nearly 5,800 women were trained in forest governance. In Myanmar, the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation’s (IFC) Powered by Women program supported seven leading renewable energy
firms in enhancing women’s role in community stakeholder engagements. It led to increased opportunities for women in the hydropower sector, including more jobs in leadership positions (Maynes et al 2022). The ongoing Lake Chad Region Recovery and Development project aims to build the capacity of local authorities, community institutions, and community-based organizations, including women’s groups, to increase women’s participation in community management committees and their economic empowerment. The World Bank Group is also focused on supporting local NGOs and CSOs in Afghanistan (Box 2).

**BOX 2: SUPPORTING THE PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN**

Since August 2021, the World Bank and the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF) have supported the people of Afghanistan through off-budget financing outside the control of the interim Taliban administration (ITA). This financing has leveraged co-financing from other donors and partner organizations in support of critical basic services. Projects focus on agriculture and food security, education, health, livelihoods, water, and NGO/CSO support. They are implemented by UN agencies and NGOs and include specific provisions to ensure that women and girls benefit from project activities. Robust monitoring frameworks are in place to assess whether women are meaningfully involved in and benefit from project activities and a third-party monitoring agent provides critical on-the-ground reporting.

In conflict and crisis situations, humanitarian interventions often operate at a large scale, but gender analysis is rarely applied, resulting in a missed opportunity to address gender-based inequalities and mobilize women. For humanitarian action to be effective, it must be implemented with an understanding of changing gender norms and roles (Daigle, M 2022). Investment in understanding power dynamics and the actors with influence on attitudes toward and the treatment of women and girls in the policy arena can help identify acute risks and longer-term vulnerability and how best to mitigate them. The global debate about linking humanitarian assistance with development interventions that seek to build resilience and capacity for recovery has gained traction in recent years, yet significant convergence remains elusive (Kreidler, C., Battas, S., Seyfert, K. & Saidi, M. 2022). While saving lives is a priority in crisis situations, in FCV settings, crises are often recurrent and prolonged. This demands a balance between meeting immediate needs and building community and institutional capacity to help the transition from humanitarian dependency to recovery and peacebuilding.

2. **Enable women’s access to economic opportunities**

Enabling women’s access to economic opportunities can help address disruptions in market activities and related job losses and reduced incomes in FCV settings. Women often encounter more barriers than men regarding access to finance, property rights, and discriminatory social norms that restrict their economic participation. FCV settings can also exacerbate GBV, directly impacting women’s involvement in markets and limiting their mobility. Limited access to resources and services, like education, health care, infrastructure, and financial services, further hinder women’s economic engagement. Women’s economic participation including entrepreneurship and access to markets are central to maintaining functioning economies in FCV settings, so breaking down barriers and ensuring equal access to resources are crucial (Box 3). Economic independence can enhance women’s decision-making power within their households and communities. It can also challenge traditional gender roles and norms, leading to greater gender equality.

**BOX 3: CLOSING GENDER GAPS IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR**

Women play a vital role in agriculture and food supply chains as farmers, producers, and traders, but they face barriers that limit their access to markets, information, finance, and labor. World Bank investments to close gender gaps in agriculture that have proved successful in various settings. They include supporting women to get their products to markets, targeting cash transfers directly to female farmers and leveraging and developing digital infrastructure while providing mobile phones to women farmers (World Bank 2020b).

In Yemen, the Desert Locust Project’s cash for work program supports incomes of female farm laborers and helps increase women’s contributions to household income and food security. It aims to expand women’s options to engage in different types of activities while taking into account their traditional, dual responsibilities at home and on the farm.
Investments in infrastructure are often needed to improve access to markets. In the Solomon Islands, the Community Access and Urban Services Enhancement (CAUSE) project supported the government equalized economic opportunities between women and men by improving the basic infrastructure and services. The project also prioritized skills training, short-term employment, and income-generating activities.

Designing projects that respond to women’s responsibility for childcare and domestic work is essential. For example, the Yemen Emergency Crisis Response project sought to provide short-term employment to the most vulnerable, including women, to respond to alarming levels of food insecurity. A key component was providing flexible hours and on-site childcare to enhance women’s access to the public works program. In Burkina Faso, the Social Safety Net Project provided childcare support to supplement income and skills development programs for women. The Djibouti Regional Economic Corridor project also uses childcare services to improve conditions for women traders on the border of Ethiopia and Djibouti.

Access to childcare ensures women can participate in the workforce which benefits business as well. The private sector – as employers, investors, and partners – has a critical role to play in identifying and scaling solutions to tackle the global childcare crisis, complementing public sector investments and particularly in contexts where public resources are constrained. IFC’s flagship report on Tackling Childcare as well as a country reports (including from Myanmar, Iraq and Lebanon) show that employer-supported childcare can improve the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women, lower absenteeism and turnover, and boost productivity and employee satisfaction. A recent IFC study from Nigeria also highlights the importance supporting the growth of care enterprises, including many small, women-led providers, to meet growing demand.

**Personal initiative training** has helped female entrepreneurs increase profits in several countries, including in FCV settings. The World Bank's Africa Gender Innovation Lab helped scale up a successful personal initiative training program in nine countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia, after finding that women who participated in the training in Togo saw a 40 percent increase in profits, compared to those who followed a traditional business training (World Bank 2020a). The Africa GIL has also worked with partners to adapt this curriculum for women farmers and is now testing its effectiveness in Mozambique.

The private sector plays a leading role in job creation in FCV settings and often replaces the public sector in delivering services. Purposeful partnerships with the private sector can increase women’s labor market opportunities. Much of IFC’s engagement focuses on expanding opportunities for female entrepreneurs, for example through MSME financing or advisory support to female farmers/ cooperatives, and linking female entrepreneurs to markets through corporate supply chains. For example, the IFC partnered with Activa Cameroon to address access on dual fronts: a) expanding access to services for women such as tailored insurance products and conducting training for agents/staff to enable them to sell, and b) creating job and income opportunities for employees and agents. Other examples of IFC’s work on job creation include Diversity4Palestine and Nigeria2Equal projects. Private sector leaders can also be mobilized to change attitudes and transform gender norms through workplace-based interventions. This can be achieved by addressing gender gaps that prevent women from fully participating in the workforce (Box 4).

---

**BOX 4: MOBILIZING THE PRIVATE SECTOR ON GENDER EQUALITY**

Under the *Waka Mere project* in Solomon Islands, companies identified gender roles and GBV as the two key drivers of workplace gender inequality and low participation of women in the workforce. Participating companies made changes to their policies and practices and invested in a holistic and locally-relevant leadership course for women that covered all their businesses. They also made changes in policies and practices. After participating in Waka Mere, companies and their employees report significant advances in workplace gender equality. Results include improved skills and confidence, and greater job opportunities for women, with 80 percent of the first cohorts of leadership graduates receiving a promotion or additional responsibilities. More women are employed in jobs traditionally held by men.

A public-private-civil society partnership in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the *Bel isi Initiative*, aims to galvanize the private sector to play a transformational leadership role in changing attitudes toward family and sexual violence and also provides services including case management and safe housing to victims of domestic and sexual violence. An evaluation of the Initiative showed productivity increases, cost savings, and a reduction in lost work time in the firms that adopted and followed workplace measures and policies, along with attitudinal shifts.

---

5 See the World Bank Gender Thematic Note on What Works in Supporting Women-led Businesses for more details and additional examples.
3. Sustain commitment and financial resources

Transformational change requires sustained policy commitment and financial resources. The World Bank Group recognizes women’s important role in resilience, security, justice, and economic development in order to achieve sustainable development outcomes. Both the Bank’s FCV Strategy (2020–25) and its Gender Strategy (2024–30) make corporate commitments to supporting gender equality in FCV settings. Both strategies recognize that achieving gender equality is particularly challenging in FCV settings, yet action is critical for building peace and resilience. The FCV Strategy aligns its gender equality goals with the Gender Strategy, by affirming that the World Bank will help countries close gender gaps in education, economic opportunities, and access to labor markets; tailor social protection for households whose family structures have been disrupted by conflict; increase access to finance for women-owned businesses; provide empowerment opportunities for youth at risk; prevent and respond to GBV; and enhance women’s participation in all levels of governance, including peace and state-building processes (IEG 2023) recognizing the complexity involved in FCV settings and calling for country-specific and conflict-sensitive approaches to implementation.

Over the past six years, the World Bank has increased its investments to close gender gaps in FCV settings (Figure 2). The World Bank has also focused on addressing the drivers of FCV, especially for those affected by multiple forms of vulnerability and marginalization, including women and girls. Investments are being scaled up by progressively targeting more beneficiaries, strengthening country systems (including institutions and policy frameworks), and coordinating with other development partners on a common strategy to deliver larger, complementary programs or “delivering as one” (IEG 2023).

The number of projects to close gender gaps in FCV-affected countries rose from 39 in 2017 to 130 in 2022. During fiscal years (FY) 2017–22, 605 projects in FCV-affected countries were approved by the World Bank Board of Directors. Of these, over 75 percent met the “gender tag,” meaning that a logical chain addressing a gender gap (including analysis, actions, and results indicators) was presented in final project appraisal documents (PADs). Of these, 70 percent of projects addressed one or more gender gaps related to improving human endowments, removing constraints for more and better jobs, removing barriers to women’s ownership of and control over assets, and enhancing women’s voice and agency and engaging men and boys.

A gender flag is applied to IFC operations. In FY23, IFC’s gender flagged LTF projects increased to 43 percent of total LTF projects, compared to 12-14 percent in prior years. Similarly, on the advisory side, gender-flagged projects reached 56 percent in FY23 compared to 42 percent in FY19-22. IFC has a significant gender footprint in fragile states, working on specific themes, such as expanding financial inclusion, strengthening agribusiness value chains, creating income-generating opportunities, supporting a more equitable care economy, and addressing GBV and sexual harassment. In many FCV settings, such as Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Myanmar, and Solomon Islands, IFC works with groups of companies through peer learning platforms to drive and scale impact. IFC’s Africa Fragility Initiative (AFI) has a strong gender program applied across conflict assessments and operations in 32 FCV-affected countries.

Financial sustainability can be achieved by integrating gender considerations into strategic planning, such as Country Partnership Frameworks (CPFs), and ensuring that gender-responsive actions are embedded within these frameworks to align the Bank’s resources with initiatives that aim to close gender gaps. Leveraging the private sector as an important partner in promoting gender-transformative private investment is also critical. This could involve supporting policies and reforms that encourage private sector involvement, as well as fostering public-private partnerships that are financially prudent. These efforts help to mobilize additional resources for gender equality initiatives and ensure their long-term financial viability.
Strengthening institutional resilience and capacity is another cornerstone for sustainability. By building robust national systems and improving state functions, the Bank helps to create a stable foundation for gender equality initiatives to thrive. This focus on institutional strength underpins the sustainability of development outcomes and ensures that progress made in closing gender gaps can be maintained over time. These elements work in concert to create a sustainable financial ecosystem that supports the advancement of gender equality in some of the world’s most challenging environments.

4. Engage women as leaders to promote stability and peace

Women’s participation in community-level decision making leads to greater accountability, increased responsiveness to citizen needs, and better social cohesion (Klugman et al. 2014). World Bank Group projects across the public and private sectors have identified different entry points to support and build women’s leadership capacity. In Yemen, the Emergency Crisis Response Project worked to empower communities through the establishment of Village Cooperative Councils, in which women are given more prominent roles alongside male village council members (Box 1). Project implementation units can also advance women’s leadership, not only by employing gender experts, but also by creating a pipeline of women who can advance to technical and leadership roles through internships, mentoring, and shadowing programs. Building women’s leadership capacity at the community level has important contributions to wider stabilization goals.

Women’s organizations are often key players in civil society, fostering social cohesion to promote peace and counter drivers of fragility. For example, during the civil war in Liberia, women’s groups campaigned actively against wartime rape and advocated on behalf of women’s issues. At the end of the civil war, women activists started peace huts to mediate disputes, creating a more permanent way of mediated local disputes and preventing violence while nurturing an ethic of peace and fostering social cohesion (Paffenholz et al. 2017). In Iraq, while the inclusion of women, youth, and civil society in local peace agreements was not associated with safer conditions for the return of internally displaced people, their inclusion was associated with a longer duration of return (Parry and Aymerich 2022).

Women have played important roles in countering violent extremism in many settings including non-FCS countries. For example, Women’s Leadership Schools in the Kyrgyz Republic and programs in Morocco trained women as spiritual guides to lead prayers in community mosques and combat messages of extremism (Paffenholz et al. 2017). Some civil wars have catalyzed women’s empowerment, building the momentum for the creation of more gender-sensitive institutions and legal frameworks, as evidenced in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda (Berry 2017), Liberia (World Bank Institute and IFC 2014) and Nepal (Ashild 2017). In post-conflict reconstruction, political changes may offer unique opportunities to initiate or institutionalize progress on gender equality (e.g., through new constitutions, the formation of new governments, and the development of new social contracts).

5. Apply laws and regulations for gender equality

Engaging in FCV settings requires knowledge on how laws and regulations impact women, girls, sexual, and gender minorities. Armed with relevant evidence and information, policy dialogues can then focus on how reforms and operational engagements can catalyze gender equality outcomes. The World Bank has addressed legal, regulatory, and institutional reforms in several FCV settings using a range of instruments, including Programs for Results (PforRs) and Development Policy Financing (DPFs).

For example, World Bank-led advocacy in DRC resulted in the adoption of a new Family Code. In 2013, the Ministries of Gender and Justice proposed revisions, which included removing the requirement for women of marital authorization to sign a contract, register a business, and open a bank account. Parliament adopted the new Family Code in 2016, but implementation has been uneven, especially in the most conservative regions of the country where customs and social norms impede the growth of women-led businesses (Braunmiller and Dry 2022 and Ubfal 2023). The WB SME Growth and Development Project (PADMPME) and the Empowering Women Entrepreneurs and Upgrading MSMEs for Economic Transformation (TRANSFORME) projects in DRC include activities to disseminate the code (addressing potential information gaps) and promote behavioral change that can lead to its implementation.

Regulatory reforms can help close gender gaps and reduce poverty among forcibly displaced communities. While data and evidence are lacking, research is expanding (Box 5) and the World Bank continues to build a track record of support for gender-sensitive policies that benefit both refugees and hosts. For example, a PforR in Jordan, the Economic Opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian Refugees, supported implementation of a component in the Jordan Compact that addresses Syrian refugees’ formal access to the Jordanian labor market so they can be self-reliant and contribute to the Jordanian economy (Ali Slimane et al 2020). The project targeted changes to regulations governing home-based work, which impact the economic opportunities of Syrian women refugees in Jordan who have childcare responsibilities and limited mobility.

In FCV settings, it is often particularly important to analyze the coexistence of different legal systems (modern, customary, and religious laws) and the constraints to law enforcement due to the possible coexistence of two conflicting political and institutional orders (World Bank 2012, OECD 2019b, World Bank 2021b). In Chad, the Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) program and in Burkina Faso, the Forest Implementation Program (FIP)-Decentralized Forest and Woodland Management Project both adopted culturally sensitive approaches operating within customary law systems.
to promote women’s access to land. Accompanying technical and financial support also helped women’s groups increased their productivity. In Chad, women’s groups were able to increase their cultivated area from 152 hectares to 1,921 hectares between 2016 and 2019 (IEG 2020). In Burkina Faso, the FIP project helped women’s associations secure access to land and play a significant role in managing forest community resources in a sustainable way (World Bank 2019a).

**BOX 5: BUILDING THE EVIDENCE-BASE ON THE GENDER DIMENSION OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT**

The ratification of the Global Compact on Refugees in 2019 was an important milestone in international aid efforts, but a stark lack of data and evidence has stymied policy action that could improve responses to forced displacement. Research conducted by the Gender Dimensions of Forced Displacement (GDFD) research program* used large scale nationally representative quantitative datasets to fill critical policy-relevant knowledge gaps. It developed innovative methods to examine a range of interrelated drivers and manifestations of gender inequality – including income and multidimensional poverty, livelihoods, gender norms and the risks of experiencing intimate partner violence and child marriage. It offers the following recommendations for policies and programs to improve gender equality in displacement settings.

**Respond to high monetary and multidimensional poverty rates of displaced communities.**

- Opening up economic opportunities for displaced women by, for example, offering safe and accessible education and training, reproductive health services, and affordable childcare, and lifting legal barriers for working women.
- Addressing gender gaps in school attendance, primary school completion, unemployment, and legal identification in displaced households, while increasing the levels of access in both host and displaced communities.
- Adding components to projects that address childcare, GBV prevention and response, and lifetime learning and overcome mobility constraints by locating project services close to communities.
- Consider elements of social protection to promote inclusion and opportunities:
  - Include displaced people explicitly in social registries
  - Ensure that targeting criteria consider displacement-related factors
  - Augment with productive inclusion measures, such as savings and loans groups, small grants, coaching, confidence building, gender dialogues, and training
  - Support internally displaced people and refugees as they graduate from assistance, empowering them to continue positive economic and livelihood trajectories.
- Link refugees and internally displaced people with programs designed for them by providing legal identification and sharing information.

**Respond to elevated risks of intimate partner violence (IPV) and other forms of GBV for forcibly displaced women and girls.**

- Increase investments in programs to prevent, mitigate, and respond to violence experienced by both displaced women and host community women with consideration to diversity of individual identities and circumstances and adequacy of funding.
- Provide easily accessible health and psychosocial support, financial and livelihood opportunities, and access to safety and justice to survivors of GBV that meet humanitarian minimum standards.
- Promote GBV prevention programming, including efforts to change social norms that underpin violence in the community and interventions that provide women with financial resources to enable autonomous decision making.
- Set up consultative mechanisms so that the voices of displaced women can inform program design and implementation.
- Increase investments in prevention by engaging men and boys in accountable practices and introduce programs that seek to lower the risk of the co-occurrence of IPV and violence against children in the home.

* The Gender Dimensions of Forced Displacement (GDFD) research is funded by the Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement research partnership which comprises of the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the World Bank. The GDFD worked with academic researchers, and humanitarian and development practitioners to identify research questions, conduct analysis and produce results. Sources: Arango et al 2021, Hanmer et al 2022
6. Influence informal institutions, attitudes, behaviors, and norms

Informal institutions, including gender roles, social norms and attitudes, and social networks, influence gender equality. It is important to engage with informal institutional change to promote gender equality and create a more inclusive society that benefits all. The following approaches have contributed to gender transformative change in informal institutions in FCV settings. The interventions provided as examples engaged different actors and partners across sectors to address the underlying drivers of gender inequality rooted in social norms and institutions and sought to challenge patriarchal power and privilege to bring about gender transformative change.

Effective GBV prevention and response requires understanding informal institutions and their interaction with other actors and institutions in the policy arena. While there are multiple entry points to address GBV in informal institutions, World Bank operations in FCV settings that include GBV prevention and response activities continue to be driven by urgent emergency interventions. For example, the Health and Gender Support Project in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, included an $8 million program to respond to a dramatic increase in GBV associated with the influx of Rohingya refugees. In Ethiopia, the Response-Recovery-Resilience for Conflict-Affected Communities provides GBV survivors with improved access to the services and comprehensive care needed to recover from the impacts of the violence they experienced. These are important initiatives but more is needed, especially additional programming to support preventative measures that encompass challenging the norms and behaviors that perpetuate GBV.

Gender dialogue groups can create sustained positive norms change, including, but not limited to, reducing IPV. A gender dialogue group typically consists of learning activities about household and relationship dynamics targeted at women and their partners. It is often implemented over several weeks and combined with interventions that seek to reinforce positive norms change. The World Bank has started to include gender dialogue groups in its operations, including in FCV settings, although results are yet to be evaluated. For example, the Cameroon Social Safety Nets project includes couples training integrated into the existing package of measures for beneficiary households. The goal is to reduce IPV by influencing behaviors and shifting perceptions of social norms around violence. In Burundi, the Cash for Jobs Project includes a behavior change component with training sessions on recognizing and preventing gender-based domestic violence.

Creating safe spaces for women and adolescent girls can impact girls’ decisions and future life courses and engender gender-transformative change. Community safe spaces can create synergies between prevention activities, community referrals, and access to services. These interventions are designed to provide an environment where knowledge that challenges patriarchal gender norms can be shared and create lasting social and behavioral change.

Safe spaces intervention under SWEDD enable girls to acquire basic knowledge and meet with a mentor, often women active in the community. Together, they talk about issues not often discussed at home, like sexual and reproductive health and gender roles. In the DRC, the Prevention and Response to GBV Project expands the scope of community-based organizations’ activities and focuses on improving existing safe spaces and establishing new ones at the community level. These spaces create an environment of trust around service delivery and encourage service-seeking, ensuring that services for survivors are not stigmatizing and provided in a space that also offers other activities targeting women and girls who have been exposed to conflict more broadly.

Mobilize the community, including gatekeepers and influential leaders, such as married men, religious leaders, elders, and teens, and engage them in activities that aim to reinforce positive social norms about gender roles and attitudes. A body of evidence shows community mobilization can prevent various forms of GBV (see Elleberg et al 2015, Jewkes et al 2020). The SASA! approach, for example, engages community members from various social and economic strata in a structured process that has reduced IPV in some settings. Interactive and reflexive activities are used to unpack different dimensions of power and other key themes, including gender inequality, violence, activism, and collective responsibility (Michau and Namy 2021). An evaluation of the results of SASA! Implemented in Kampala, Uganda from 2008 to 2012 indicates that SASA! reduced women’s risk of physical IPV by 52 percent, reduced sexual concurrency among men (27 percent of men in SASA! Communities, compared to 45 percent in control communities), and reduced the social acceptability of violence (76 percent of women and men in SASA! Communities rejected men’s use of violence against women, compared to only 26 percent in control communities) (Abramsky et al 2014). Results from qualitative findings show that participation in SASA! Enhanced various aspects of intimate partner relationships, such as increasing trust and cooperation, more open communication, and a broader aspiration to strengthen the partnership (Kyegombe et al 2014).

The “husband school” implemented through the SWEDD program works to transform the habits and biases of married men and future husbands. In western Burkina Faso, the husband school resulted in men helping their wives with household chores and participating in maternal health and family planning. The Harnessing the Demographic Dividend project focuses

---

6 SASA! is an evidence-based community mobilization approach to prevent violence against women.
on raising awareness among parents and their daughters about girls’ empowerment. The goal is to overcome restrictive gender norms and positively influence parental aspirations and investments toward their daughters, specifically keeping girls in school and avoiding child marriage and early pregnancy.

Evidence shows some adverse gender norms can be hard to shift. For example, the West African NGO Tostan was an early leader in community-led approaches to end female genital mutilation in Senegal; however, it has proven difficult to achieve progress. UNICEF (2022) concludes that despite ongoing efforts, practice levels have not moved for at least the last two decades. The World Bank Gender Innovation Labs are working on several studies to build the evidence base on the impact of community mobilization on gender norms.

Use the productive inclusion approach, which builds on existing social protection programs to add assets, community support, and skills training to cash transfers. The approach has achieved success across different countries and cultures, including Afghanistan, where an evaluation found that per capita monthly consumption increased by 30 percent compared to the control group, and the share of households below the national poverty line decreased by 20 percentage points from 82 percent. This was achieved mostly through the expansion of labor choices of ultra-poor women. Early results are also encouraging from other World Bank productive inclusion projects in FCV settings that include activities to increase women’s empowerment (Box 6).

BOX 6: INCREASING WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PRODUCTIVE INCLUSION IN THE SAHEL

Sahel Social Safety Net programs in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal have been augmented with an integrated set of productive inclusion measures tailored to the needs of cash transfer recipients, 90 percent of whom are women. Activities included coaching, the creation of savings and loan groups, support to access markets and psychosocial interventions, and cash grants of between $150 and $250 (capital intervention). These were successfully delivered through existing government systems with community volunteers and NGOs. Psychosocial interventions—life-skills training and a community-wide film screening and discussion targeting social norms and collective aspirations—aimed to build the skills of the beneficiaries and to strengthen support they receive from their household and community.

The program evaluation shows a significant improvement in economic outcomes and strong impacts across various dimensions of psychosocial well-being. Results on intra-household dynamics were mixed. Psychosocial and capital interventions both increased women’s psychosocial well-being and empowerment, but in distinct ways. Women in the capital arm experienced increased autonomy, including greater control over their own earnings and productive activities and an increased relative share of household revenues. Women in the psychosocial arm strengthened social relationships with their partners and community, built social capital, and experienced increases in revenues primarily through other household members’ activities (Bossuroy et al 2022).

Work with men and boys on gender norms and masculinities in conflict and post-conflict settings. A joint program between the MenEngage Alliance and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) seeks to engage men and boys to reduce gender inequalities and decrease GBV (MenEngage Alliance and UNFPA 2012). Together, these organizations tailor education, awareness raising, and safe spaces interventions to encourage men to play a positive and pivotal role in transforming gender norms. For example, the Men’s Leadership Program of Women for Women International works with male community leaders in the DRC to speak out against GBV and change negative gender norms. Similarly, a study by Promundo and CARE-Rwanda found that engaging men in conversations with their partners who participate in a savings club program improved economic outcomes. In the Balkans region, Promundo and CARE worked with adolescent boys through the “Be A Man” (Budi Musko in Serbo-Croatian) campaign, which led to changes in attitudes and reductions in self-reported bullying behavior.

7. Understand intersectionality of vulnerabilities in FCV

It is vital to understand and address the vulnerabilities that arise from the intersectionality of gender with disability, ethnicity, and race, as well as the risks that sexual and gender minorities face in FCV settings. Intersectionality operates at the personal level and within formal and informal institutions. Data are needed to understand how the intersectionality of different vulnerabilities impact gender minority groups and to inform policy and programming to address compounded gender-specific barriers and promote the voice and agency of women, girls, and gender minority groups.

Worldwide, sexual and gender minorities face distinctive development and protection challenges that are significantly more complex to address in FCV-affected environments and in countries that criminalize homosexual acts. Attacks against sexual and gender minorities are amplified in FCV settings.
The collapse of institutions, destruction of already-weak safe spaces, and breakdown of community and family bonds exacerbate these challenges.

People with disabilities face an increased risk of injury, death, sexual violence, and other serious harm. They often have fewer options to flee because warnings, evacuation routes, and emergency information are not accessible to them. Humanitarian assistance can be inaccessible, impacting health and well-being. The challenges faced by people with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities in FCV settings are higher for people facing multiple forms of vulnerabilities. Weak service delivery capacity and fragility and conflict-associated stresses can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities making access to basic services, such as health, employment, and housing, more complicated in FCV settings.

Lack of data is a cross-cutting factor that hinders effective programming in health, education, access to justice, housing, employment, and other basic services for people in vulnerable situations in FCV settings. The World Bank is working with partners to close evidence gaps. For example, an assessment was conducted in Uganda’s refugee-hosting districts to identify key risk factors for GBV, map services, and provide recommendations for the prevention and response services (Government of Uganda and World Bank 2020). The report recognizes that GBV against women and girls, especially IPV, was prevalent in both refugee and host communities, with disability (and childhood) an aggravating factor. It also shows that existing services were uncoordinated and inaccessible in situations of intersecting GBV. A World Bank Toolkit has been produced to help staff increase the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in operations (World Bank 2020d, Humanitarian Law Centre 2021, World Bank 2011).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender equality in FCV settings is complex and difficult to achieve. FCV countries are often at the bottom of global gender equality and human capital indexes. FCV settings are diverse and rapidly changing, so there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. However, common challenges across FCV settings include weak formal institutions, weak rule of law, increased tendencies for markets to fail, and conflict-related household disruptions. Understanding power dynamics is key to navigating the policy arena. This includes attitudes and behaviors toward women and girls, as well as norms around gender-specific roles and feminine and masculine ideals. Both formal and informal institutions create specific gender challenges, often driven by a lack of legitimacy and a breakdown in the rule of law. Labor market failures impact women and girls, who also face barriers to economic empowerment created by gender disparities in access to assets, financial services, technology, education, and skills. Family and community dynamics in response to conflict can either enforce gender norms or result in shifts that create opportunities for women and girls.

Women play an important role in conflict prevention and resolution and are essential to forging peace and stability. At the community level, women’s leadership and participation is an essential component of efforts to break cycles of violence and fragility. Addressing gender inequality is an imperative for sustainable development and inclusive, stable, and peaceful societies.
The following recommendations can help governments, development partners, and the private sector address gender inequality and improve gender outcomes in FCV settings:

**Build evidence on what works to close gender gaps in FCV settings.** More interventions that purposively aim to close gender gaps and empower women, girls, and all others discriminated against because of gender need to be implemented and evaluated. Partnerships between academic researchers and development practitioners with gender expertise in interdisciplinary research have delivered results (see Gender Dimensions of Forced Displacement and Sexual Violence Research Initiative).

Areas where more research and evaluations are needed include whether and how investments in economic empowerment, livelihoods, community-driven development, and private sector mobilization can drive gender norms change; the intersectionality between gender and other vulnerabilities in FCV; key population groups of concern, such as camp-based populations, returnees, and host communities.

**Understand the policy arena in FCV settings, including power dynamics, gender norms, and behaviors.** The analysis of gender norms in FCV calls for sensitivity to the diversity of experiences within affected communities. While conflict can reinforce traditional gender norms and exacerbate GBV, it can also create opportunities for challenging these norms and promoting gender equality through targeted interventions and inclusive policies. Understanding the specific context and engaging with local communities and actors are crucial for effective responses that address the complex interplay of gender dynamics in FCV settings.

**Engage with a wide range of national and local actors and development partners to better understand how formal and informal institutions, actors, and power relations play out in the policy arena in FCV settings and tailor solutions to local contexts.** Work with local actors to identify champions and frame innovations to resonate with local perspectives. Deep knowledge of local context and social structures can be gained by engaging with locally led and women-led organizations and national gender experts and learning from the experience of development partners, including international NGOs and UN agencies active in the humanitarian space. The traditional separation of humanitarian and development funding hinders effective support. The World Bank Group’s increased involvement in FCV-affected states could be crucial in breaking this cycle and fostering long-term development (IRC. 2023). Framing the evidence to inform policy dialogue and partnerships will help to engage broad coalitions and create partnerships to transform gender hierarchies and accelerate gender equality.

**Strengthen national systems and formulate long-term plans to address gender inequality, including responses to GBV, in FCV settings.** Where state institutions have weakened or are on the verge of collapse, development partners can play a vital role in safeguarding national systems and preventing further deterioration. This involves sustained engagement with state institutions at both policy and service delivery levels. Preserving the capacity of state institutions and local actors during conflicts is essential not only for building resilience to manage fragility and conflict impacts but also for enhancing preparedness for recovery and peacebuilding. The scope of institutional capacity building should extend beyond formal structures to encompass support for local communities, women’s groups, and local influential bodies capable of challenging harmful gender norms. Establishing partnerships and fostering collaboration between development and humanitarian actors is imperative for achieving sustainable results.

**Adapt rapidly to emerging challenges, notably at the intersection of climate and conflict.** Data on the intersection of gender and climate are needed to understand impacts and develop effective adaptation and mitigation approaches. This will necessitate knowledge not just on effective interventions through impact evaluations, but a wide range of information drawing on various data sources including climate data, household survey data and agricultural data to understand and address the gender elements of this intersection. Beyond aggregate data illustrative statistics and stories drawn from the lives of individuals and trajectories of communities can create narratives with traction that resonate with actors in the policy arena as well as the development and humanitarian community. Innovation, evidence, and knowledge sharing from World Bank Group operational experience and engagement with partners are at a premium.

**Innovate and collaborate in data collection and use.** Up-to-date information is needed to take on rapidly changing circumstances and design adequate responses in FCV settings. Yet, fragile countries are among the most data-deprived, and collecting data in FCV settings is challenging. A purposeful effort is needed to create and apply new methodologies, including process assessments and rigorous qualitative methods, as well as new data collection via satellites, drones, and cell phone data.

The World Bank has accumulated significant experience using phone surveys to monitor welfare in times of crisis and in response to emergencies (Hoogeveen and Pape, 2020). Phone surveys were successfully rolled out during the Ebola crisis. They have also been used worldwide to monitor the impact of extreme climate events and to track the effects of COVID-19 and inform policy responses. Some surveys have continued for several years. For example, the panel survey Listening to Tajikistan has been fielded for more than five years and over 62 survey rounds. In 2020, the World Bank and partners launched an global data collection effort using high-frequency phone surveys, conducting over 400 rounds in more than 100 countries. Innovations to household survey data collection were also developed for Somalia (Pape and Wollburg 2019) where, in the absence of a recent census, geospatial techniques and high-resolution imagery were used to model the spatial population
distribution. These innovations can be leveraged to strengthen partnerships and increase the production and analysis of sex-disaggregated data, such as the UNHCR World Bank Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement.

**Prioritize gender equality outcomes as part of country engagement.** New approaches to country partnership strategies can improve coherence and coordination across analytics and programs and balance meeting immediate needs with longer-term gender outcomes. The World Bank Country Partnership Framework documents can elevate ambition and enhance accountability for gender outcomes. At the same time, the scale of poverty and gender inequality in FCV settings demands mobilizing finance and building partnerships to put gender equality at the center of conflict prevention and building resilience.

**Increase efforts and investments to prevent and respond to GBV**, which is disproportionately prevalent in FCV settings and contributes to the overall cycle of violence. The World Bank has gained experience in GBV prevention and response, which can provide the foundation for scaling up investments in this area and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in World Bank Operations: Taking Stock After a Decade of Engagement Gender-Based Violence Prevention 2021-23 (World Bank 2023d) sets out a vision for deepening GBV preventions and response in the decades ahead.

**Adapt operations in FCV settings to advance gender equality outcomes.** This includes developing implementation frameworks outlining the division of responsibilities between state and non-governmental actors to ease mutual distrust, bringing services closer to people through mobile service provision, and building on community infrastructure. Create safe spaces for GBV survivors and expand support for women’s economic inclusion. Maintain flexible approaches informed by ongoing analysis of demands for services and opportunities to strengthen service provision to adapt interventions to dynamic and often insecure contexts (World Bank 2023b).

**Invest in partnerships**, with balance between state actors, NGOs, development partners, and communities. These focused partnerships support country-level dialogue and legal reforms, operational challenges, and a clearer understanding of social norms and policy dynamics.
REFERENCES


