

## “STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SECURITY AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN TAJIKISTAN” PROJECT



Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are some of the key findings, validations and programming recommendations that have been drawn from the past two years of the Project implementation:

#### **Resistance and reluctance in changing of the endemic societal values and norms**

Issues such as DV and youth engagement in violent and criminal groups are driven by much broader and pervasive gender and societal norms affecting youth and women's positions within communities and their perception of and vulnerability to violence. The most effective and sustainable response to these issues therefore requires a deeper recognition and change in endemic societal values. However, while this project has produced evidence of these deeper drivers of violence and insecurity, across the board there is less opportunity – and in some cases, a strong reluctance – to discuss these issues. This includes the underlying drivers of which domestic violence is one symptom – the pressures and norms, for example, for women to be homemakers and obedient to husbands, and the pressures on men to provide an income and accordingly to maintain a dominant position. These are difficult topics, and can sometimes become personal – as a result, many of the dialogues, policymaking and even action planning has focused on specific manifestations of these issues (such as domestic violence) while resisting a more in-depth look at harmful societal values and how these might be addressed. Even at the government level, responses to DV come from a legal and policing perspective, and throughout the project, while there was a growing willingness to improve these systems, there was also a reluctance to address the root problems. Additionally, this reluctance to address deeper root causes of violence means responses to DV and other issues are themselves constrained by these same harmful norms, in turn exacerbating issues rather than helping to resolve them. For example, some legal practices and responses will encourage survivors to return to their families, as this fits with the traditional narratives of family values, reinforcing the attitudes that are major contributors to women's vulnerability in the first place. Even within this project, action plans and discussions were still very constrained by traditional norms – for example, the skills development workshops tended to fit very traditional roles for women and men, e.g. sewing and cookery courses specially targeted towards women, reflecting the traditional “homemaker” role of women in society. Nevertheless, the project did start to see some shifts at the community level with men joining sewing courses and breaking out of these traditional molds. Ultimately, women economic empowerment and job insertion, even in traditional “female-run” professions, proved to be a positive lesson learned as related to survivors of domestic violence who managed to become economically independent and live a life free of violence. The headway made in this project is a good foundation and model for future work, highlighting the potential to shift harmful norms.

#### **Shifting deeply entrenched attitudes and harmful norms requires considerable long-time efforts, and resources**

In terms of programming recommendations, this comes back to the timing and resources available for projects like this. Shifting deeply entrenched attitudes and harmful norms requires considerable time and resources, building on the models explored in this project – as well as extreme caution in ensuring that any activities do not put communities at further risk.

#### **Lack of infrastructure and support services**

There is a critical lack of infrastructure from the government side, emergency support for women is particularly lacking, reinforcing the issues highlighted above, with DV survivors often facing few options and forced to return to dangerous home environments. So, while working on the demand side is important, the supply side

must be supported to ensure people coming forward are given adequate support and not being made more vulnerable than before. This is essential for any programming in this sector, where the sensitive nature of the issues being discussed and addressed heightens the vulnerability and risks faced by women. The training modules on provision of direct support measures to survivors of violence should include the risks assessment and management as well as explanation of the consequences of some harmful practices such as mediation in domestic violence cases.

#### ***Coordination Mechanisms to serve DV survivors***

In the project design, it was noted that activities needed to include an assessment of coordination mechanisms before subsequent activities were developed and implemented. This served two purposes. The first, this allowed project teams to have a clearer picture of existing referral mechanisms and state support initiatives, and identify gaps and areas for additional support, ensuring there is a clear pathway for survivors (i.e. working on the supply as well as demand side). Additionally, by making the decision to work with existing structures, specifically the Multi-Disciplinary Working Groups, the Project and partners were able to secure greater authority buy-in for the activities and overarching objectives, essential for project approval as well as longer-term sustainability. While there were considerable issues identified in how MDWGs were supporting DV survivors, they were at least a recognised body (formally at least) which proved to be important for such a short-term project where a new initiative would not have had time to build community trust and recognition from the authorities.

#### ***Support from the national level is critical for effective interventions at the local level***

While the project did enjoy good relationships with authorities, particularly at the local level, a key lesson that has come through is that any local level programming must be supported by national level advocacy where harmful social norms are reinforced within legal frameworks, policymaking and broader rhetoric. It was largely beyond the scope of this project to engage substantially at this level, again largely due to time constraints – as noted above, national level actors are difficult to pin down and so only two national conferences were held. However, beyond time constraints, national level work particularly can be greatly enhanced through collaboration with other actors to strengthen awareness-raising and advocacy on relevant issues, and to ensure activities are complimentary, not duplicative or contradictory. The Project was careful to ensure this throughout the project, reaching out to a host of other organisations and establishing a close working relationship with other organizations delivering similar activities, such as the OSCE, GOPA and UN Women. With more time, these relationships should be developed further to establish a stronger and more unified advocacy on women's rights and prevention and GBV/DV, engaging with national-level policy-makers to ensure their buy-in and understanding of the issues, and drawing from a variety of project initiatives to reinforce campaigning and advocacy messages. During this project, policy dialogues tended to focus on recommendations rather than enforcing change. With more time and more collaborative action, however, greater shifts in policy and more systemic change might be seen. In a context like Tajikistan, having state bodies and civil society on the same page, especially around the more complex issues of gender norms, would help ensure more sustainable results and create a uniformity of messaging.

#### ***State buy in and delays in project implementation***

**As the Project experience has demonstrated, even proper planning and advance actions, including collaboration with government partners, cannot guarantee timely implementation of project activities.**

Unfortunately, preparations and waiting time for state approval of the essential project activities, such as work of gender experts and lawyers on **data and legal analysis**, as well as trainings delivery as initially scheduled by UNDP project implementing partner took longer time than planned. Abovementioned activities **have commenced** with more than 2 months' delay.

Thus, it is highly recommended that **design, launch and official endorsement for project implementation should be a separate priority task** before the Project has been approved internally and commenced. This is highly relevant for such kind of sensitive Projects as prevention of violence and community security. Also, it is advisable **to engage with stakeholders, specifically with state actors while designing the Project** to ease the

buy in and implementation process. This is not full guarantee, since sometimes shifts inside the Government may cause delays but reduces “waiting time” substantially.

***Reliable statistics is crucial. Lack of combined statistical data for GBV.***

Over the course of the project implementation, it became clear that there are numerous gaps in official statistics around GBV/DV cases. Early on in the project, low levels of reporting were highlighted as a key issue and many survivors were not coming forward to seek legal, psychological or even financial support. However, it has emerged that while low levels of reporting are certainly an issue, much of this appears to be at the official level, with authorities and police not recording cases that they consider as “resolved” or “insignificant”. In addition, since GBV/DV is dealt by numerous state bodies, including police, COWFA, judiciary, prosecution office, local Governments, Legal Aid Centres, NGO run DV services etc, there is no unified data. The NGOs traditionally lead in identifying DV victims and keep quantitative and qualitative data on their beneficiaries/profiles. This may mean that many aspects of GBV/DV are not being captured by state records and substantially are not being responded to/followed up as effectively as they could be with accurate official data. This can lead to two critical points. The first, that DV cases are considered “resolved” – meaning survivors are not receiving follow-up support and at risk of being returned to violent environments. Second, the picture of GBV/DV in Tajikistan given by the official statistics is incomplete, that leads to inappropriate or ineffective programming and response mechanisms. To counter this issue through this project, implementing partners triangulated/compared official statistics with results of the gender and conflict analyses and monitored findings to create a more nuanced picture of the situation in project areas. Future programmes must make sure they adopt a similar and should actively encourage better reporting by official bodies through advocacy and policy outreach work.

In order to strengthen data collection of GBV/DV it is crucial to strengthen mechanisms of data collection from different players. In doing so, it is recommended:

At the first stage, to set-up a coordination mechanism under the Agency for Statistics under the President of RT for the development and coordination of the model of a single database, elaborate and approve methodology and software of a single database.

The structure of the coordination mechanism should include all institutions involved in the production of statistics on VAW and work in 2 directions:

- counting and reporting of crimes and administrative offenses (law enforcement agencies)
  - record appeals to social services at government agencies and public associations, other non-profit organizations.
- 1) *Any database is an information model that allows to store data about a group of objects that have the same set of properties/characteristics. Harmonization of statistical data and the creation of a single database on VAW is a very complex process that requires not only considerable financial costs, but also human resources and time. A key role in this process to play is **methodological support. It is very important to develop and implement common approaches to the concepts / categories used in this area and the classification of types of violence, especially domestic violence.*** This applies both to the problems of classifying types of violence based on articles of the Criminal Code of RT when recording and reporting crimes, and when keeping records of complaints of victims of violence by various Support Centers and social services.
  - 2) When developing the model of a **Unified Database on VAW**, the experts proceeded from the fact that for the registration of crimes related to VAW, there is already **a database of the Main Information and Analytical Center (MIAC) under MIA RT that shall be expanded by including data on all types of administrative offenses in it.**

Therefore, in order to create a unified database on VAW, (1) reporting on crimes of MIAC of MIA RT is used in accordance with the approved forms, and (2) reporting on complaints of violence from the victims, applied to various support centers (medical and social rehabilitation rooms, CoWFA’s Resource Centers, Crisis Centers, shelters, Legal Aid Centers and other). According to the legislation, reporting is provided to the Statistics Agency, which generates a general report on statistics on VAW.

Different types of support centers for victims of violence do not have a single database. In this regard, it is recommended to **create a unified database of applicants, victims of violence, for various centers and support services** (medical and social rehabilitation rooms, KJHS Resource Center, crisis centers, shelters, etc.).

**In line with that, it is also recommended to consider the opportunity to initiate development of the united state-run EVAWG portal** that would contain, based on discussions with stakeholders, five sections on engaged state partners, specifically: mvd.tj, prokuratura.tj, sud.tj, moh.tj, minjust.tj, where statistical data, news and methodological information on the theme of EVAWG would be posted.

In development of such a Data Base, some other major challenges should be taken into consideration, such as imperfect legislation that “hide” DV acts under other administrative or penal infringements currently in use by law enforcement, the issue of attributing a coding system to identified/assisted cases of DV as to be able to avoid double counting of the cases, and the need to comply with the requirements of the national legislation as related to technical pre-conditions on establishment and registration of any Data Base. It is also crucial to study beforehand the launch of such initiative, the existing international practices on running similar unified/hybrid Data Base on VAW, if such exist.

***COVID 19 has further deteriorated situation on DV. COVID-19 response activities shall include addressing DV during and after pandemic.***

The recent studies conducted by GOPA/PDV on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families of persons affected by DV<sup>1</sup> and UNDP on COVID-19 impact on lives, livelihoods and MSMEs revealed the negative affect on the economic situation, psychological environment in the survivors’ families, that even further deteriorated violence and limitations in accessing to existing services for the victims.

The economic hardship caused by the recent global pandemic (particularly amongst migrant workers from Tajikistan who are unable to work in Russia this year) has further highlighted the relationships between DV and wider issues affecting the community. As humanitarian and development actors now look towards Covid-19 responses, this project would urge them not to ignore DV and other risks of violence in their responses. Likewise, initiatives responding to DV need to recognize these issues do not exist in isolation and a more collaborative response to underlying issues could result in more effective and wider-reaching impacts. The lessons from Covid-19 are applicable to all kinds of external shocks – some of which were highlighted in the report – showing that projects need to be flexible and adaptable, but also need to recognize the interconnectivity of some of the issues being addressed, especially deeply rooted harmful gender and social norms which will inform, drive and hamper community and government actions across the board.

More lobbying efforts are needed to convince the Ministry of Health to increase the amount of social services procurement, including from the experienced NGOs, for the direct support to DV survivors who became even more vulnerable during the continuous pandemic time.

***The need for continuous thematic trainings for Government bodies and state and non -state service providers for survivors of GBV/DV***

The thematic trainings for the prosecutors, judges, court secretaries, judicial enforcement agents, para-lawyers and police officers from the Police station front offices were very useful for these target groups. Due to the limited project resources, only a small part of the specialists in each target group, were covered. The limited project timeframe and resources were insufficient to ensure that the successfully piloted/tested training modules are institutionalized in the corresponding intra-agency (initial and continuous) capacity building structures.

The positive impact of the trainings for police officers from the project target regions was felt immediately after trainings: 23 Protection orders were issued in Kulob district and 18 Protection orders were issued in Qabodiyon district in the couple of months. The local NGOs also provided their positive feedbacks about the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://pdv.tj/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Report\\_\\_24-11\\_20\\_eng\\_final.doc.pdf](https://pdv.tj/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Report__24-11_20_eng_final.doc.pdf)

involvement of other local specialists such as judges, prosecutors and lawyers in the DV cases referred by them after the occurred trainings. However, the one and half day trainings were just a first wave of such capacity building initiative targeting only a limited number of specialists. It is crucial to ensure that the whole justice system is free from gender-related stereotypes and incorporates a human rights and victim-oriented approach in its day-to-day work. One and a half day training was a unique opportunity for trainees to revise their perception about PDV, get familiar with the existing legislation, regulations and good international practices in the field. Nevertheless, additional and continuous capacity building and awareness raising (including within the current intra-agencies system of professional capacity development) should be further organized and institutionalized.

Given the positive feedback from central level authorities in organization of trainings, it is imperative to continue to provide support to the national institutions in integration/adjustment of the topic on adjudication/addressing DV-related offences/crimes in their training curriculum of the justice system professions, and provide technical support to the justice system in continuous capacity building. The corresponding institutions need further support in institutionalizing their curriculum and forming a pool of trained trainers in the current state system of capacity building of such professions, including the training materials to be used in the on-job training sessions. It is necessary to continue to implement judges' professional development programs to assure high level of professional preparedness and conduct in the jurisprudence on DV cases, developing "zero tolerance" to DV within the entire justice system in Tajikistan. Judges and prosecutors need to be encouraged to refer DV victims to assistance services existing in the country, others than those of the law enforcement bodies. It is also necessary to set up efficient mechanisms of enforcing court decisions, so that survivors enjoy the realization of their rights provided for them in the laws.

Access to justice for DV victims is not only about building the legal mechanism in place to protect victims and sanction the perpetrators, but also about ensuring that other direct-support services are available that provide crisis intervention/safety for survivors. These crucial chains (direct-support structures) contribute to victims' identification, provide immediate support and facilitate victims' access to justice by ensuring they are able to reach out to legal professionals and law enforcement. The psychologists' role is crucial in the pre-trial phase. Psychologists should closely work with lawyers in order to assure effective rehabilitation, both from psychological, as well as legal perspectives, and to enhance the survivor's ability to effectively interrelate with the justice system.

**N.B!** During the stakeholder consultations it became clear that even experts need specific refreshment from time to time - data and IT experts of the key state bodies and NGOs also require gender thematic capacity and knowledge on specific EAW issues, since upon the time some knowledge given during the trainings might be lost.

***Application of existing legislation to prevent GBV/DV needs to be further strengthened. Mediation is not the good mechanism for resolving DV cases.***

Even though the current legislation is not in line with international standards, it still allows for applying punishment for the systematic DV-related offences, this does not yet happen in Tajikistan in practice. There is a certain resistance among law enforcement to apply existing legislation in the practice. For example, the police officers confirmed that the administrative penalties applied to DV perpetrators are not only ineffective but also contribute to increase of non-reporting of DV cases to police and contribute to more non-cooperative behavior of survivors. Most acts of DV are categorized by police as acts of hooliganism being mixed with other categories of administrative infractions. The judges reported that they feel pressure from central and local authorities to impose for divorcing couple the time for reconciliation (to preserve the family at any price), even they understand that it may put the DV survivors under danger of continuous violence and even provoke suicide attempts.

Besides imperfect legislation and absence of synopsis of the rule of law in adjudication of DV offences, the widespread stereotypes related to the role of women in the family and perception of pseudo-traditions as norms in Tajik society defeat the law and dispensation of justice for DV victims. One of the widespread and contra-productive measures systematically applied by specialists of state institutions in the reported DV cases in all

regions of the country is the tendency to apply immediate mediation between the victim and perpetrator.

The mediation practices (recommended for family members in conflict situation, often called “family conferences”) can be dangerous in cases of violence against women, especially in cases of DV. Cases of violence against women involve unequal power relationships between the parties, based on acts of assault, violent intimidation, and/or controlling, abusive, or humiliating behaviour. Mediation assumes that parties approach the process with equal resources and power – which is not the case in the situation of DV. The 2011 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and DV prohibits — mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes, including mediation and conciliation, in relation to all forms of violence covered by the convention (Art. 48). This approach should be further ensured through UN agencies and their implementing partners in Tajikistan.

The existence of direct and immediate counseling services providing psychological and social support to DV survivors helped prevent suicides as reported by the disparate Tajik women-beneficiaries of this assistance that was possible due to project resources.

The strengthened coordinated community response, ensured through enhancing the role of the local MDWGs in Kulob and Qabodiyon, led to positive outcomes: the local specialists increased inter-agency coordination, communication and identification of DV cases (681 cases), and referral for the needed support. Those 681 identified and assisted survivors of DV have been provided with informational and direct support measures, and in some cases with suicidal attempts among young married women – allowed saving their lives and give a hope for a better future free of violence.

#### ***Public awareness campaigns are critical for prevention and combating DV***

Female DV survivors, especially from remote communities, still lack information on the legislation on combating DV, on their rights and resources of legal assistance to which they can turn to. DV victims wish that local authorities, especially in the rural areas, do not tolerate the DV phenomenon. Access to information and gender-based non-discriminatory attitudes would influence the victims of DV’ decision to report acts of violence and access means of justice, being thus empowered to benefit from the protection of the legal rights and appropriate remedies. There must be more active efforts to provide information to the population, especially to the DV’ survivors, about the competences of the authorities and institutions empowered with tasks of DV prevention and combating, about the police and trust-line telephone services and about the state-guaranteed services of free legal assistance in Tajikistan.

#### ***In order to ensure comprehensive approach towards reduction of DV cases, there is a need for the development of services for aggressors***

To assure DV victims’ protection, it is necessary to scale up efforts of developing services for aggressors as a way of preventing violence relapses. In this regard, the pre-tested and apparently successful practice of the Family Perpetrators’ Behaviour Correction service run in Levakant by GOPA Branch within PDV project in Tajikistan could be scaled up in other regions. It will help in diminishing the phenomenon of withdrawing charges/non-cooperation of the DV victims with the law enforcement bodies during the trial and the pre-trial phase, increase their protection and overall response of the system in the country.

#### ***Usage of information technologies remain a strong tool for protection of women and girls from DV, however, it shall be carefully approached to avoid potential harm and potential fortification of gender stereotypes.***

During Hackathon campaign, beta version of the “Oilai Hushbakht” mobile application to protect women from violence was developed by IT specialists. The app allocated the SOS button in the hidden format. On one hand, the application provided the articles on how to ensure harmony in the family, on taking care after children, different recipes, etc., while on the other hand, **it contained information on how to prevent violence** and/or how to act in case if violence took place already. The application provided the opportunity to contact Resource Center 1313 hotline via SOS button (voice messaging) and SMS.

With time UN Women and EFCA-Tajikistan noticed that the application started using the ads and articles that do not promote gender equality and, to the contrary, leads to gender stereotypes. This practice was stopped immediately until the content was changed.

***Engagement with Youth and project beneficiaries is extremely rewarding. The pool of experts that have been trained might be further engaged to scale up interventions to reduce GBV/DV***

As the Project experience demonstrates, investments into youth and project beneficiaries is rewarding:

- in 2019 20 youth activists received the 6-days leadership training, called “Voices against violence” conducted by UN Women. Importantly, when they returned home, the participants **with no funding managed to conduct mini actions** with the rural population to prevent VAW during ‘16 days of activism to stop VAW’ campaign: Actions carried out with initiative youth in the Rudaki and Yovon districts by the House-to-House method on the topic “My strength is not for violence” with the goal of preventing domestic violence; information sessions for nurses and students at the Medical college in Yovon district.
- Beneficiaries were a part of the hackathon in September 2019. They provided an important feedback to developers and were encouraged to openly talk about their problems to help other peers, because the products, developed during the Hackathon, were to be offered to a wide group of beneficiaries.

Therefore, it would be useful for all to create a **pool of trained [youth] activists/community mobilizers** for further engagement in all SGBV and EVAWG related projects, including in capacity of volunteers in the field.