



WOMEN AND GIRLS' SAFE SPACES
A Toolkit for Advancing Women's & Girls' Empowerment
in Humanitarian Settings



PILOT & END LINE ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

BACKGROUND

Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) are defined as “a structured place where women and adolescent girls’ physical and emotional safety is respected and where women and adolescent girls are supported through processes of empowerment”.¹ Considered a minimum component of GBV programming in emergency settings, WGSS have been used for decades by GBV actors in humanitarian programming as an entry point for women and girls to report protection concerns, express their needs, access vital services, engage in empowerment activities, and connect with the wider community.

In the spring of 2018, with the support of Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and International Medical Corps (IMC) jointly carried out formative research to answer the questions: (1) What are the requirements for effective delivery of a WGSS (i.e., infrastructure, staffing, and supervision) both via direct services as well as partnership based approaches? (2) What are the minimum standards for safely establishing effective WGSS? Using these questions as overall frames, we introduced eight thematic areas of inquiry:

- (1) Gaining buy in from communities;
- (2) Recruitment and staffing practices for WGSS;
- (3) Engaging women and girls in designing WGSS and activities;
- (4) Approaches to ensure access to WGSS by at-risk vulnerable women and girls;
- (5) Integrating survivors of GBV into WGSS;
- (6) Key considerations for monitoring WGSS activities;
- (7) Existing best practices on engaging men and boys in outreach; and
- (8) Increasing local ownership of WGSS.

Based on the findings from this research, IRC and IMC joint developed the Women and Girls Safe Space Toolkit (WGSSTK), which was then piloted by IRC teams in Lebanon and Thailand and IMC teams in Cameroon and Ethiopia, from December 2018 to April 2019. Following this pilot period, an assessment was conducted with IRC and IMC staff, women and older adolescent girl beneficiaries from the pilot WGSS spaces, and community members from the areas of implementation. The qualitative assessment aimed at assessing feasibility and user-friendliness of the tools and approaches developed for program staff as well as the feasibility and responsiveness of WGSS according to women’s, girls’ and community members’ voice and choice.

¹ International Rescue Committee and International Medical Corps (2019). *A Global Toolkit for Women and Girls Safe Space: Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings*

DEVELOPPING A RIGOUROUSLY PRACTICE-BASED GLOBAL RESOURCE

The findings from the formative research highlighted the lack of available tools to assess, design, implement, monitor and demonstrate the value of WGSS as a catalyst for transformational change towards women's and girls' equality. Within these overarching gaps, formative research participants specifically requested guidance on: practical measures to engage community stakeholders and to secure and maintain community buy-in; how to design women and girl led WGSS and put in place inclusion strategies; staffing and recruitment guidance to effectively support WGSS objectives; capacity building approaches to promote the empowerment of women and girls; and measurement guidance and tools to demonstrate the outcomes WGSS have on women's and girls' safety and empowerment.

“[The core concepts tool]...really allowed staff to reflect on the guiding principles and tangibly connect the dots on how these very big concepts manifest in their everyday actions... [it] leave[s] WGSS staff with a sense of renewed pride for their work...”

WGSS Senior Staff, Lebanon

Following feminist-informed principles and approaches IRC and IMC drafted the WGSS Toolkit (WGSSTK) based on practice-based learning rigorously contextualizing the knowledge and experience of field staff, women, adolescent girls and community members across 18 WGSS operated in Cameroon and Ethiopia by IMC and in Lebanon and Thailand. The Core Concepts chapter of the WGSSTK serves as an overarching framework defining the feminist informed guiding principles and approaches which must drive how staff design, implement and monitor WGSS programs as well as the specific objectives all WGSS should work towards in order to empower women and girls. Chapters reflecting the project cycle of WGSS implementation offer 38 practical tools, databases and guidance placing context tailored, women and girl led, inclusive and community informed strategies at the core of the safe space approach.

The toolkit provides technical guidance and tools to:

- **Assess need, safety and feasibility of a new WGSS**
- **Set up an inclusive women-led space that guarantees compliance with WGSS and GBV guiding principles**
- **Staff the space with capacities to ensure the quality of the program and attitudes which embrace diversity**
- **Build new and strengthen existing capabilities of WGSS staff, implementing partners, staff from hosted services as well as WGSS members on WGSS programming**
- **Strategically implement activities to reach specific objectives and promote the empowerment of WGSS's members**
- **Finally phase out or phase over in a harmless, empowering and sustainable way**

WOMEN & GIRLS' SAFE SPACES TOOLKIT: PILOT & END LINE ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

END LINE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

This assessment used mixed methods approaches to assess the feasibility and acceptability of the pilot WGSSTK in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Thailand and Lebanon. Methods involved structured surveys with staff, female beneficiaries and community members. A total of 15 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 6 KIs were conducted with staff and female beneficiaries. Finally, key informant interviews were conducted with supervisory level staff. All assessment tools were developed in English but carried out in staff and participants' preferred languages (French or Foulbé in Cameroon; English, Amharic, or Nuer in Ethiopia; English or Karenni in Thailand; English or Arabic in Lebanon). Trainings in ethical and rigorous data collection were provided to staff members carrying out the surveys and FGDs with beneficiaries and community members.

	Cameroon	Ethiopia	Thailand	Lebanon
Women beneficiary surveys	15	27	17	21
Adolescent girl beneficiary surveys	12	2	13	9
Community member surveys	31	30	20	32
Women beneficiary FGDs	6	2	1	2
Adolescent girl beneficiary FGDs	6	2	1	3
Staff written surveys	17	18	2	9
Staff FGDs	3	2	0	2
Staff Key Informant Interviews	1	2	2	1

KEY FINDINGS

THIS RESOURCE WAS HIGHLY DESIRED AND FILLS A SIGNIFICANT GAP IN TECHNICAL GUIDANCE FOR GBV STAFF IMPLEMENTING WOMEN & GIRLS SAFE SPACES

According to FGD and KI participants, technical guidance provided in the toolkit has added substance and value for WGSS staff and left staff feeling empowered that the work they had been doing was professionalized. Staff particularly noted the usefulness and importance of specific data collection tools, allowing staff to measure the quality of programming, but also individual participant's increase in empowerment, decision-making, and social networks. Staff also found the FGD and KI questions for participants useful for informing the quality of WGSS design. Other well-received resources were the community mapping and service mapping tool. Staff felt that by including women and girl's voices in the planning and choosing process, they were able to systematically take into consideration the safety of the women and girls as well as accessibility of the WGSS. In addition to engaging with women and girl participants, the stakeholder analysis tool was vital in determining dynamics of key stakeholders to ensure coordinated buy-in and participation. While many WGSS look different, staff appreciated the toolkit because it allowed for a harmonized approach while accounting for contextual differences.

"...women and adolescent girls who come regularly to the centers, some for years now, as well as staff...felt like they were connecting in a meaningful and new way together."

WGSS Senior Staff,
Lebanon

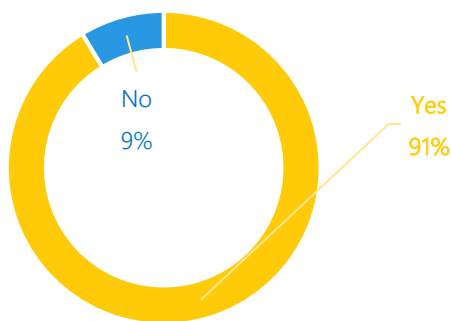
WOMEN & GIRLS' SAFE SPACES TOOLKIT: PILOT & END LINE ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Perhaps most importantly, staff reported that the toolkit supported them to conceptualize the meaning of and find great pride in their work. The core concepts guidance helped staff tie their everyday actions and gave a larger purpose to what teams were working towards.

When implementing the community survey tool, WGSS staff found the honest opinions of community members (both negative and positive) to be reaffirming and made them feel proud of the impact and change among the women and girl participants. Reflection activities like the staff and volunteer attitude surveys facilitated routine checks on staff's core values and capacities to improve their job performance and better serve WGSS members. Supervisors

also felt the attitude surveys were a great tool to empower staff with their own knowledge of what it takes for them to be successful. Some staff found the stress management sessions for WGSS members to also benefit WGSS staff as many experience secondary trauma but have historically lacked the space to reflect and process. The new reflection activities in the toolkit have facilitated the space and compassion amongst teams with an added awareness of other staff's well-being and self-care methods. 100% of surveyed staff plan to use the WGSSTK once finalized, with 48% saying they'll use it daily (Weekly: 17%; Monthly: 24%; Only when needed: 11%).

Percentage of staff involved in WGSS toolkit field-testing who indicate that new toolkit improved their capacity to implement Women and Girls Safe Space interventions



ACCESS TO WGSS IS DEPENDENT ON A NUMBER OF FACTORS, MOST IMPORTANTLY THAT IT IS A SPACE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS ONLY.

Women and girls received information about the WGSS primarily through friends and family, community-led discussions, or referrals from other organizations and felt the timing and schedule of available sessions/activities were suitable. However, some felt the lack in outreach and awareness of WGSS's function and programming impacted women and girl's opportunities to participate in the safe space. A few women and girl FGD participants voiced that many of their peers had never heard of the WGSS. Those who had heard didn't know what a WGSS was, what services it provides, and who the safe spaces are for. Women and girl participants felt that this was a missed opportunity for their peers and encouraged more awareness and education around the purpose and function of WGSSs so that others may also benefit. Other barriers to participation included parental/husband's permission, competing

"The [WGSS] place is safe, and we can freely chat as men and boys are not allowed to come to the center."

WGSS Participant, Ethiopia

WOMEN & GIRLS' SAFE SPACES TOOLKIT: PILOT & END LINE ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

responsibilities in the home, and distance in travel to the space itself. What was of greatest importance to the WGSS participants and staff was that the space was wholly women and girls only, which facilitated participant's ability to trust the WGSS and to feel free, safe and respected. FGD participants also shared that a women and girls only space allows parents of adolescent girls to feel comfortable in allowing their daughters to attend.

WGSS ARE CRUCIAL RESOURCES FOR THE WOMEN AND GIRLS THAT ATTEND

Results from the formative research demonstrated that program staff were missing strong tools to monitor and evaluate their WGSS. To address this issue, the teams were provided with a number of tools and databases during the pilot: a logframe and indicator matrix, staff attitudes assessments and facilitation observation checklists to assess staff quality, WGSS attendance and activity tracking forms, a community engagement tracking forms and a survey to assess community perception of the WGSS, and a baseline/endline survey to assess both WGSS member satisfaction and program outcomes.

“Before we saw it just as a place where we learn some activities, now we will see it as a place where we revalue the woman.”

WGSS Participant, Cameroon

During the feasibility and acceptability study, staff reported that the community survey and the WGSS member surveys were particularly valuable to their understanding of the impact of their work. Of 116 WGSS members surveyed across the 4 pilot countries, 98.3% reported satisfaction with staff quality and activities offered at their WGSS (Cameroon: 96%; Ethiopia: 97%; Lebanon: 100%; Thailand: 100%). Women and girl members overwhelmingly approved of specific handicraft and skill building activities such as sewing and shampoo/soap making, as well as group educational discussions. Some of the most useful topics reported include early marriage, confidence,

negotiation and problem-solving skills. Through WGSS activities and participation, 53.9% of women and girl members reported an increase in their perceived decision-making skills (Cameroon: 62.9%; Ethiopia: 31.0%; Lebanon: 65.2%; Thailand: 56.6%). Additionally, 65% reported an increase in their sense of empowerment (Cameroon: 62.9%; Ethiopia: 62.0%; Lebanon: 65.2%; Thailand: 70.0%). WGSS members reported feeling respected, free, comfortable, and happy that the WGSS is an inclusive place where they can safely relieve their stress regardless of their disability status or socio-cultural background. WGSS also provide vital knowledge, resources and services for women and girls who experience or know of someone experiencing violence, sexual exploitation and assault (SEA). Of members surveyed, 93.5% reported knowing where someone can get support if they're experiencing violence and 87.0% were able to identify safe methods of reporting SEA. Members across all 4 pilot countries listed WGSS as an essential service provider in their area for survivors. Possibly most importantly, WGSS have provided opportunities for women and girls to meet and build relationships with 96.8% of surveyed members reporting an increase in social support networks they can turn to for support due to the WGSS (Cameroon: 96%; Ethiopia: 100%; Lebanon: 91%; Thailand: 100%).

COMMUNITY MEMBERS APPROVE OF WGSS BUT NEED MORE AWARENESS RAISING AND SENSITIZATION

Of 101 community members from participating WGSS locations who completed the “perceived WGSS purpose scale”, an average of 66% understood the purpose of women and girl's centers (Cameroon: 81%; Ethiopia: 83%; Lebanon:

WOMEN & GIRLS' SAFE SPACES TOOLKIT: PILOT & END LINE ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

75%; Thailand: 11%). Community members felt the WGSS supports women and girls through strengthening social relationships, stress management skills, and that it is a place where women and girls can voice their needs. Several women and girls voiced concern around their ability to participate due to men's perception of the WGSS. Women and girls expressed that some men and boys believe the safe space to be a place where women and girls waste time that could be spent on domestic duties or where they learn to be disobedient. While 96% of surveyed community members understood that WGSS are places where WGSS support women and girls in creating or strengthening social groups, there seemed to be a lack of understanding that WGSS are open to all women and girls, even if they have not experienced violence. There also appeared to be a misunderstanding around the WGSS being a place where women become financially independent. This indicates that even though 96% of surveyed community members were aware of the WGSSs, there is a need for additional awareness raising activities and sensitization relating to the purpose of the safe space in order to facilitate greater women and girl's participation. That being said, two community members in Lebanon who had not been aware of the safe space at the time of the survey responded positively to ad hoc sensitization, saying "we need this program" and "When you explained, I became excited for having you in the community."

WOMEN AND GIRLS' SAFE SPACES: A TOOLKIT FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Available in English and French October / November 2019 at: www.gbvresponders.org



Funding provided
By the United
States Government

For further information about the project and findings, please contact: Melanie Megevand (melanie.megevand@rescue.org), Laura Marchesini (lmarchesini@InternationalMedicalCorps.org), or Betsy Laird (betsy.laird@rescue.org). Additional information about the IRC's GBV program models, research, and advocacy can be found at: www.gbvresponders.org