



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**

## **How can food security interventions contribute to reducing gender-based violence?**

*Issue Brief*



## Key messages

**Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread and life-threatening problem exacerbated in poverty, natural hazards or conflicts,** due to the breakdown of family and community protection structures and the stress of extreme financial hardship.

The underlying **causes of GBV lie in historically unequal power relations between men and women and pervasive discrimination against women** in both the public and private spheres. Women and girls are known to be most vulnerable to GBV, but men and particularly boys are at risk also.

**By negatively affecting the health, resilience and productive capacity of survivors, GBV has a devastating impact on agricultural productivity, food security and nutrition.** These negative consequences extend beyond the survivor to their families and communities.

**The work of FAO and its partners** to protect, support and restore sustainable livelihoods for men and women in rural and agricultural settings, and **when delivered in safety and with dignity, is inherently protective.**

**Multi-sectoral livelihoods programmes that address social and economic issues together** are more successful in reducing GBV than single track approaches.

**Men play a key role in preventing gender-based violence.** As decision-makers, community leaders, perpetrators, allies and as agents of change, their role and participation is essential to change negative social attitudes and discriminatory practices against women.

*Cover photo: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – Cooperative members making baskets and mats from the harvest of date palm, which they sell to the local market. This date palm project was supported by FAO in Afembo District of Afar region in Ethiopia. The idea is to diversify income to tackle the negative impacts of El Niño induced drought for pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Members get salary and dividends from the cooperative income from the sale of animal feed and date palm products.*

## 1 Purpose of this Issue Brief

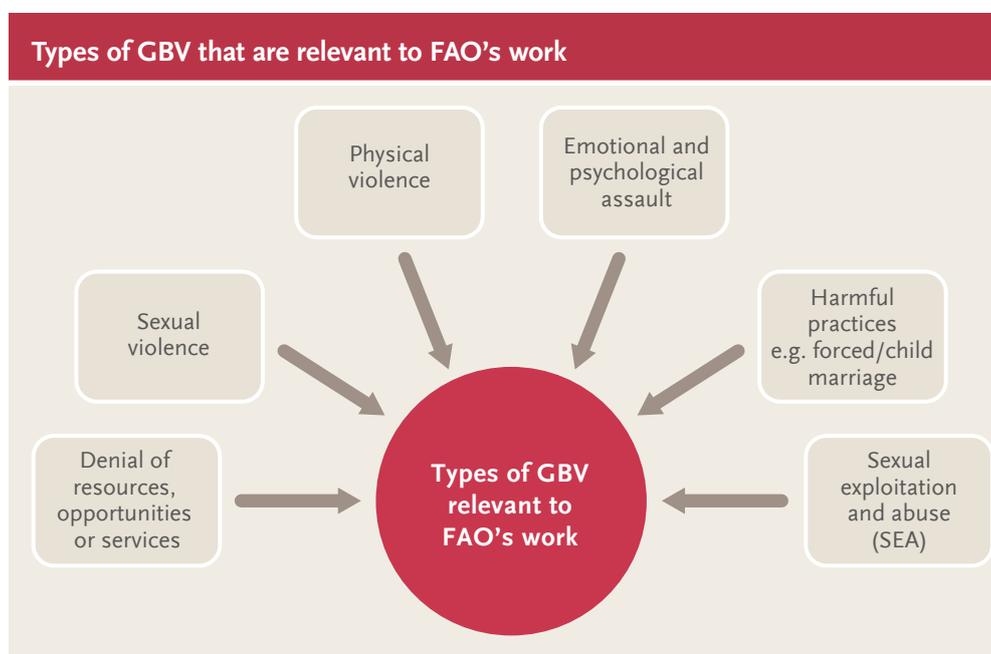
This Brief has been developed to introduce FAO staff and partners to both the relevance and practical know-how of addressing gender-based violence in food security and agriculture interventions.

## 2 What is gender-based violence?

“Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females.”

Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015

The term ‘gender-based violence’ is most commonly used to underscore how systemic inequality between men and women – which exists in every society in the world – acts as a unifying and foundational characteristic of most forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls. **Using “GBV” instead of “violence against women” (VAW) draws attention to the socially constructed nature of many forms of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence.** In other words, how society defines and creates masculinities and femininities and the norms that influence relationships between the sexes. Although attention tends to focus more on women and girls due to their higher levels of vulnerability, GBV is known to affect other individuals to varying degrees depending on the context (i.e. men and boys, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or intersex (LGBTI) individuals).

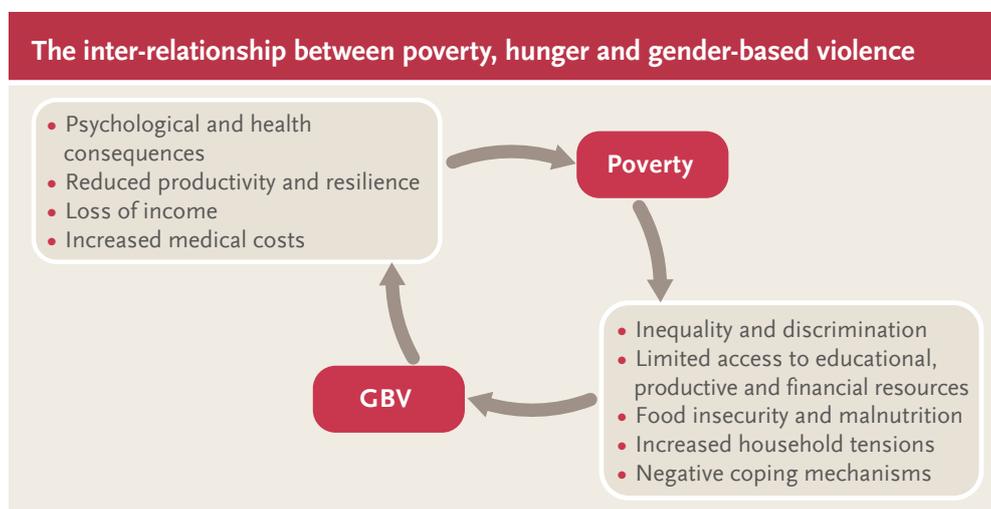


The underlying causes of GBV lie in historically unequal power relations between men and women and pervasive discrimination against women in both the public and private spheres (UNGA, 2006). These inequalities are often linked to deeply-rooted socio-cultural beliefs and practices that assign specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations to male and female identities, and as a result limit the choices and opportunities available to each gender. These include beliefs in family honour and sexual purity, ideologies of male sexual entitlement and weak legal sanctions for sexual violence.

Factors that perpetuate or heighten the risk of GBV exist at individual, community and societal levels and are aggravated during times of crisis such as natural hazards and climate-related or man-made disasters. For example at **individual level** – histories of abuse within families, food insecurity, HIV status, denial of access to productive and financial resources, dependence on another to meet basic survival needs, lack of awareness of rights, while at **community level** – breakdown in community protective mechanisms, lack of health, psychosocial and legal services, limited female staff presence, a culture of “blaming the victim”, and at **societal level** – a weak state, state-sanctioned violence, discriminatory laws and the inability or unwillingness to punish perpetrators, war and conflict.

### 3 Why does GBV matter for food security?

Gender-based violence is widespread globally and tends to be exacerbated by food insecurity, poverty, and the advent of humanitarian emergencies. GBV has severe negative consequences not only for victims and survivors, but also for their families and communities: **by negatively affecting the health, resilience and productive capacity of survivors, it has a devastating impact on agricultural productivity, food security and nutrition** (FAO, 2017). These negative impacts lead in turn to increased poverty, thus creating a self-reinforcing cycle of underdevelopment, poverty and violence (UNGA, 2006). Furthermore, because it mostly affects women and girls in the productive ages (15-45), GBV perpetuates gender inequality, thus further stalling progress in poverty reduction. The World Health Organisation has found that on average one in three women globally will experience intimate partner violence or sexual violence in their lifetime. The same study found that **in some crisis settings, GBV affects over 70 per cent of women** (WHO, 2013).



Although it exists in all societies and contexts, GBV is of special relevance to FAO's work for five important reasons:

1. Men and women in FAO's areas of intervention are often at heightened risk of experiencing GBV because crisis situations, and gender norms and food insecurity increase vulnerabilities;
2. FAO initiatives may inadvertently put people at risk of GBV or create tensions at household and community levels that lead to an increase in GBV;
3. GBV is a manifestation of gender inequality and is therefore profoundly connected to the achievement of women's economic empowerment;
4. The consequences of GBV lead to losses in productivity for the agriculture sector with negative impacts on food security and nutrition;
5. Interventions that foster sustainable livelihoods and improve women's access to productive assets, skills and knowledge contribute to protection from GBV.

## **4 Good reasons to address GBV in FAO's work**

### **Alleviate suffering, improve gender equality, food security and nutrition**

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation that has devastating consequences for survivors and their family members and at times leads to loss of life. Addressing it involves striving for gender equality and women's empowerment to reduce vulnerabilities and challenge social norms that sustain violent behaviour and gender discrimination. This approach will also have positive effects for building resilience, achieving food security, improving nutrition and reducing rural poverty. Conversely, food security and agricultural interventions that restore and strengthen rural livelihoods, can contribute to the protection of families and individuals from the destitution that so often leads those who are most vulnerable to trade their safety or that of their dependents for survival. Hence, FAO's work when it meets the specific needs of men and women and is delivered in safety and with dignity, can be inherently protective.

### **Do no harm**

The concept of "do no harm" means that humanitarian organisations must strive to "minimise the harm they may inadvertently be doing by being present and providing assistance" (IASC, 2015). Food security and agriculture interventions can unintentionally create new risks or even worsen GBV, particularly if the socio-cultural context and specific protection risks are not well understood. To reduce these risks, FAO and its strategic partners can reinforce the 'do no harm' principle in their work by being accountable to the men and women they serve, working to the highest professional and ethical standards, understanding the interplay between their interventions and local contexts, and adjusting programmes so as to avoid any unintended negative impacts.

### **Leave no one behind**

In 2015 global leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and pledged to leave no one behind. This goal was reinforced again at the World Humanitarian Summit where FAO made some specific commitments in support of the Agenda for Humanity and towards gender equality and the elimination of GBV. Leaving no one behind means reaching everyone and empowering all women, men, girls and boys to be agents of positive transformation. Furthermore, it is an

endeavour to reach first those who are furthest behind. This also implies working to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence through effective actions that empower and protect especially women, adolescent girls and children.

## 5 Global and corporate frameworks for addressing GBV

Gender-based violence has gained increasing attention amongst the international community due to its negative impacts upon all sectors of humanitarian and development work and the current lack of sufficient mechanisms to respond. Below is a table that highlights some of the major efforts towards addressing GBV in humanitarian and development work.

| Global frameworks and accountability mechanisms  | FAO commitments  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Development Goal 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, especially targets 5.2 and 5.3<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>2</sup>, especially General Recommendations 12 and 19 on GBV/VAW</li> <li>• The Sphere Humanitarian Charter<sup>3</sup>, protection principles</li> <li>• The CFS <i>Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises</i> (CFS, 2015), especially principles 4.2 and 5<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Statement of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on <i>The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action</i> (IASC, 2013)</li> <li>• The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) (UNISDR, 2015)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO Policy on Gender Equality: Attaining Food Security Goals and Rural Development (FAO, 2013a)</li> <li>• FAO Strategic Framework (FAO, 2013b), where gender is a cross-cutting theme that is integral and instrumental to the achievement of the five Strategic Programmes.</li> <li>• FAO Resilience Agenda<sup>5</sup> as part of Strategic Objective 5: “to increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises” has gender as a cross-cutting issue</li> <li>• FAO’s Accountability to Affected Populations, core commitment 6<sup>6</sup></li> <li>• FAO’s commitment to the World Humanitarian Summit 2016. Commitments 23 and 24 are specific to fighting GBV.<sup>7</sup></li> </ul> |

1 Target 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation and 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. For more information, see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

2 Full text of the Convention is available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

3 For further information see: <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/the-humanitarian-charter/>. FAO has committed to the Sphere Project’s four protection principles, which are: 1. Avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of your actions; 2. Ensure people’s access to impartial assistance – in proportion to need and without discrimination; 3. Protect people from physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion; 4. Assist people to claim their rights, access available remedies and recover from the effects of abuse.

4 Principle 4.2 Protect those affected by or at risk of protracted crises – Protecting against all forms of gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly towards refugees and IDPs, to allow safe access to resources to meet food and nutrition needs; Principle 5 Empower women and girls, promote gender equality and encourage gender sensitivity

5 For more information, see: <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/background/fao-and-the-post-2015-development-agenda/resilience/en/>.

## 6 How to address GBV in practice

### Guiding principles for mainstreaming GBV protection in FAO's work<sup>8</sup>

1. **Understanding the local context and building on women's and men's strengths and assets:** Build upon the local capacities, knowledge and services and respect local cultures.
2. **Safety, dignity and avoid causing harm:** Prevent and minimize unintended negative effects of any intervention that can increase people's vulnerability and exposure to GBV risks.
3. **Inclusive access:** Pay attention to access issues (e.g. discrimination or stigma) preventing people in need from accessing aid, services and workshops.
4. **Participation and empowerment:** Inform both men and women about project objectives and ensure their engagement throughout the project cycle.
5. **Coordination and partnerships:** Promote and maintain strong and respectful partnerships with other sector specialists, in particular, those with protection and GBV expertise, including GBV sub-clusters and other coordination bodies.
6. **Accountability to affected populations (AAP):** Setup appropriate mechanisms through which FAO can measure the adequacy of interventions, ensure transparency and address concerns and complaints of both men and women of different ages.

### Addressing GBV concerns throughout the project cycle

In order to effectively minimize risk for aid recipients and partners and contribute to the protection of local populations, GBV concerns should be integrated throughout the project cycle. **Practitioners should be aware of the context-specific links between GBV, food insecurity and opportunities for FAO to not only prevent GBV but also contribute to the protection of vulnerable individuals.**

**Three overall goals for integrating GBV interventions in humanitarian action that all international and national actors should aim to work towards (IASC, 2015):**

- Reduce risk of GBV
- Promote resilience by strengthening national and community-based systems that address GBV, and by enabling survivors/those at-risk to access support
- Aid recovery of communities and societies by supporting local and national capacity to create lasting solutions to the problem of GBV.

6 For more information, see: <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/fao-in-action/accountability-to-affected-populations/commitments-to-affected-populations/en/>. For more information on Commitment 6: "Prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by FAO personnel and implementing partners", see: <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/161854/>.

7 FAO Commitment 23: FAO commits to developing and implementing approaches and strategies for the engagement of men and boys as part of the solution to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in crisis settings by 2018.; FAO Commitment 24: FAO commits to increasing staff training on inclusion of gender sensitive and protection measures in the design and delivery of programmes to contribute to preventing and mitigating gender-based violence.

8 Four principles have been adapted from the Protection Mainstreaming Task Team Guidance, Global Protection Cluster, <http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/en/areas-of-responsibility/protection-mainstreaming.html>.

The following actions can be a starting point to identify GBV risks and plan projects that contribute to people's protection contribute to people's protection in a gender-responsive way.

### *Needs Assessment*

- Disaggregate data by sex and age and other demographic variables (e.g. disability, single-head of household, indigenous or other minority groups).
- Identify main types of GBV in the context (e.g. denial of rightful access to or control over productive and financial resources, livelihood opportunities, information etc, physical abuse, sexual violence, emotional and psychological abuse including verbal abuse, humiliation, degrading treatment, withholding access to money/food and harmful traditional practices such as son preference resulting in daughters not receiving adequate nutrition or access to education at **household** (e.g. intimate partner violence), **community** (e.g. cultural beliefs and customary laws) and **state levels** (e.g. impunity, war).

### *Gender and GBV Analysis*

- Analyse the specific priorities, needs and constraints of women and men of different ages in relation to their livelihoods, identify gender roles and responsibilities, and determine who has control over the required assets and income.
- Identify which GBV risks men and women are exposed to, including adoption of negative coping mechanisms and experience of discrimination, stigma and isolation.
- Assess the existing capacities and knowledge of men and women and their communities to face these risks.
- Analyse in what ways GBV risks are linked to FAO interventions.
- Examine how GBV undermines nutrition and food security outcomes.
- Evaluate any GBV risks that may be unintentionally created.
- Identify which specific interventions can be implemented by FAO to prevent and mitigate GBV and contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

### *Project design*

- Target individuals and groups most at risk of GBV for livelihood, economic and life skills support (e.g. women, adolescent girls, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and/or intersex, persons with disabilities, separated and unaccompanied children, orphans).
- Incorporate gender and GBV analysis in the project concept note, making sure that proposed actions address the specific needs of men and women and ensure their safety.
- Map protection, gender and/or health agencies, and particularly local women's and youth organisations for future potential collaborations or GBV referrals.
- Combat GBV as a dual objective of the project alongside livelihood, food security and nutrition goals. Interventions that address social and economic issues together have the greatest outcomes.
- Formulate gender-sensitive indicators that can monitor impact of intervention on men and women, their empowerment and/or their safety and security.
- Allocate adequate financial resources for actions to reduce GBV risks affecting the targeted population.

### *Project implementation*

- Be principled and respectful in all interactions with beneficiaries, upholding best practice work standards for humanitarian and development workers.
- Use participatory approaches that engage both men and women in planning and monitoring of projects, and establish mechanisms for them to raise complaints and receive feedback.
- Provide information to beneficiaries on project objectives and explain that all assistance is free.
- Work in partnership with international and local protection, gender and/or health agencies and participate in existing coordination mechanisms, e.g. GBV, health and/or protection clusters.
- Strive for equal ratios of men-to- women field staff and enumerators.
- Adjust project if GBV risks are identified, and take the necessary actions for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by FAO or partner staff.

#### **Engage men and boys**

Men are key to preventing gender-based violence. As decision-makers, community leaders, perpetrators, allies and as agents of change, their role and participation is essential to change negative social attitudes and discriminatory practices against women.

For detailed guidance on integrating GBV concerns into the project cycle, practitioners should refer to *Protection from gender-based violence in food security and agricultural interventions: a guide for FAO and partner staff* (FAO, 2017). The *IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action* (2015) are another useful resource that specifically targets non-GBV specialists and non-specialized agencies.

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**This Brief was prepared by** Asha Bradley with Ilaria Sisto and Sofie Isenberg, who provided editorial and content advice.

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