Georgia Taylor, VAWG Helpdesk Roster Member and Director, WISE Development, offers advice and support on designing approaches to tackle violence against women and girls within market systems programmes.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global problem because it is an abuse of human rights and has serious human capacity and vulnerability consequences for women. An estimated 35 per cent of women over the age of 15, some 818 million women globally, have experienced sexual or physical violence.

Violence also affects women’s participation in enterprise and employment and is a cost to the economy and economic growth. (The economic cost of VAWG can amount to between 1.2 per cent and 3.7 per cent of GDP). Women and girls experience violence from partners and other family members and in the work place or on the way to work. This not only prevents women from earning an income but also restricts business productivity and profitability and so impacts economic growth. This means that donor programmes aiming to increase private sector potential and promote inclusive growth may have less successful outcomes when participants are involved in or experiencing VAWG. There is also some evidence that women in certain contexts face an increased risk of violence when the economic power balance between men and women changes. So private sector programmes need to take special care to understand gender relations and to assess risks to women and ensure their programmes do no harm, including through mitigation efforts if needed.

**Remember the individual**

And yet women’s experience of violence is usually hidden and is rarely picked up in M4P programmes. While donors encourage such programmes to ensure they include and benefit women, M4P programme teams often lack understanding of the social and cultural barriers that women face in markets and employment. Hence M4P programmes sometimes find it hard to reach and increase the benefit for women. As the M4P approach tends to have a purely market-based focus, in which systemic change should
be 'led' by a private sector lead partner, interventions sometimes only focus on a market or a value chain rather than on the individual participants in the intervention. This means that the interventions may miss out the complex lives that participants live – limiting the understanding of women's multiple roles and multiple sources of income (for example some women are active in several value chains and in different places in the value chain to men).

Context analysis and programme design may miss the multiple roles that women play and the social and cultural barriers that affect women, such as limited mobility, responsibility for all unpaid care and household work and limited decision-making power. Other issues such as high fertility, low levels of education, low self-esteem and confidence, and women's lack of access to markets, finance and resources are also often missed. This includes missing out understanding of how violence against women and girls can affect women's participation in programme activities and limit women's ability to benefit from the programme. In addition, M4P programmes are not accustomed to combining a private sector led approach with investment into initiatives such as literacy training, basic business skills, cooperative strengthening and leadership and negotiation skills, all of which may be essential for women to benefit. And yet M4P guidance states that the approach is a 'means to complement and strengthen established development methodologies'.

**Economic – and social initiatives**

Evidence tells us that approaches to increase women’s and girls’ economic empowerment (WGEE) are successful when they include a social element that increases women’s power and agency, alongside economic initiatives. An integrated approach that includes both economic and social initiatives is needed that can both tackle VAWG and make markets work for the poor. Such an approach should develop women’s economic empowerment (economic advancement AND power and agency) within the programme and should include specific action to tackle VAWG as part of that.

Successful programmes of this sort often include a gender transformative approach (e.g. gender dialogue groups, community mobilisation groups and/or mentor led groups, including addressing negative masculinities and men’s attitudes to WGEE and VAWG, working on men and women’s joint decision-making power and communication and negotiating skills, building women’s and girls’ self-esteem, power and agency). Gender training, groups and discussions are more effective when integrated into economic development activities to ensure people’s participation and emphasise the relevance to the pressing needs in their lives.

M4P programmes wishing to tackle VAWG should start with a thorough gender context analysis that identifies a range of economic, social and cultural barriers that women are facing when trying to take part in markets and earn an income. Gender analysis should identify social norms that define men’s and women’s beliefs and behaviour in relation to income earning, access to assets, economic and household roles, power balance, abuse of power and violence. When considering programme design, it is essential to choose partners (including civil society organisations) that can support work on developing women’s economic empowerment and tackling VAWG. Often partners will need capacity strengthening and a long-term relationship in order to address the issues identified in programme design.
Useful examples

For further support on designing approaches to tackle VAWG within economic development programme see the DFID Guidance note or the USAID Toolkit. These include some useful examples of approaches that combine economic and social initiatives to tackle VAWG.

➤ An RCT of the IMAGE programme in South Africa demonstrated that microfinance plus the Sisters for Life curriculum, (which included discussion of gender roles, cultural beliefs, relationships, VAWG and HIV - using participatory methods to increase women’s communication and critical thinking skills and confidence) was effective at improving women’s economic wellbeing and a reduction of violence.

➤ The Red Flag Women’s movement in Sri Lanka has been successful at mobilising women workers on tea and rubber plantations, garment factories, and among domestic workers to develop leadership. They include gender training for men and women in factories and in their communities – including modules to prevent VAWG.

➤ Also crucial for tackling VAWG in the workplace is a consistent human resource policy and practice that enables workers to know their rights and access protection, support and redress. Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) has been successful at building workers’ (predominantly young, poor rural female migrants) confidence about raising and solving problems together with managers; and supporting the election of anti-harassment committees to encourage better dialogue between workers and managers in garment factories in India and Bangladesh.

Recommendations

In order to work on VAWG and WGEE successfully, M4P programmes need to have appropriate management approaches, with good team capacity. The following is recommended:

➤ Clear strategic direction that commits the programme to tackling VAWG and building WGEE.

➤ Strong team leadership and senior management that are committed to tackling VAWG and have a comprehensive understanding of women’s economic empowerment.

➤ A mixed team with balanced private sector and social sector expertise –with at least one team member who has worked on tackling VAWG before.

➤ Civil society, government and private sector partners who can provide some of the essential services and policy connections (e.g. health, legal, psychosocial support etc).

➤ Appropriate programme tools for gender analysis, intervention design and M&E that enable an in-depth understanding of VAWG and WGEE and appropriate measurement and adaptive programming approaches.