# Terms Of Reference for Desk-based Research on Survivor-Led Accountability in humanitarian, development and peace support work

# 01/05/24

## Background

The Irish Consortium on Gender-based violence (ICGBV)[[1]](#footnote-2) has chosen to focus on accountability from the survivor perspective, over the lifetime of the [2021-26 Strategic Plan, Amplifying Women's Voices](https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf).

An ICGBV member workshop was held in June 2022, which explored the multi-faceted dimensions of ‘survivor-centred accountability’. This was followed up in August 2022, with a literature review on survivor-centred accountability *(see end of document for key findings\*)*. In addition we held an international webinar on [Strengthening Survivor Centred Accountability for Gender-based violence](https://www.gbv.ie/strengthening-survivor-centred-accountability-for-gender-based-violence-2/) during the 16 Days of Activism on Violence Against Women, in December 2023. Our journey thus far has brought us to the conclusion that we need to narrow the scope and seek out evidence of the ‘gold’ standard, ‘survivor-led’ accountability.

Therefore we are commissioning desk-based research to find evidence of established and emerging good practice in GBV survivor-led accountability initiatives across the prevention, mitigation and response trajectory.

## Survivor-led Accountability

Survivor-led accountability requires first and foremost, that the dignity of the survivor is upheld, and that resourcing and skills transfer are available for the survivor to lead the process, if they choose to do so. This includes understanding that accountability is multidimensional and individual, meaning it is based on the needs and wishes as determined by survivors. This can range from leading in the design of coordinated, quality medical, psychosocial, economic and/or legal support and shelter, being at the forefront of policy and legal reform, to leading the campaign to holding states to account. Accountability does not have an end point. The trauma of gender-based violence may take years to be addressed. It is important to consider that the needs and wishes may change over time for the survivor and for the survivor to lead their journey. Some survivor-centred approaches have been critiqued for giving limited choices to survivors for how they wish to participate in initiatives[[2]](#footnote-3).

It is especially important to acknowledge survivors’ experiences holistically. This includes the acknowledgement of physical and mental harm, social exclusion as well as the re-traumatisation that can happen while taking part in official processes. Recovery from trauma is not linear and survivors need to be enabled to leave conversations or services at any stage, without reason. There must be accountability mechanisms in place to ensure no further harm is done in the process of seeking accountability. Accountability may include broader aspirations such as economic empowerment, the realisation of civil law rights such as divorce, custody of children, equal property rights and a life free of future violence.

## Purpose of Research

To inform policy and practice with evidence of established and emerging good practice in GBV survivor-led accountability initiatives across the prevention, mitigation and response trajectory[[3]](#footnote-4).

## Key Stakeholders

Policy makers and practitioners engaged in humanitarian, development and peace support work combatting GBV.

## Research Question

What recommendations can be drawn from the evidence, or emerging evidence of survivor-led initiatives or practices that have or seek to, prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence in humanitarian and development contexts and peace support?

**Sub-questions:**

* To what extent, in what circumstances, and for whom, were these initiatives, practices and approaches successful and what enabled their success?
* To what extent have these attempts to achieve accountability, been limited or blocked by formal and informal power holders?
* Whose voices influenced the programming and policy strategies - both as originally designed and as the journey progressed?

## Methodology

Desk-based literature review of published and grey[[4]](#footnote-5) literature. This will include reports and papers published by women-led, women-centred and feminist networks and civil society organisations. Identification of grey literature from partner and partner networks will be sought from the ICGBV Learning and Practice Group, the Malawi ICGBV and the Sierra Leone ICGBV Working Group, though is not limited to these sources.

To account for the fact that ‘survivor-led’ approach to accountability is an emerging terminology which may not be fully in use, it is possible that examples of survivor-centred approaches will be included in the research (for example, there may be survivor led initiative using a survivor centred approach labelling themselves as survivor centred). Additionally, examples in which practitioners transitioned from a survivor-centred approach to one in which survivors took the lead will be sought.

The author is asked to highlight two examples which arise from the desk research, which demonstrate best/emerging practice and which can be considered for application in other jurisdictions, under each of Prevention, Mitigation and Response.

Key informant interviews, such as with the authors of grey literature or organisations at the centre of initiatives explored, can be used to elaborate on 3-6 of the overall best examples.

As a signatory to the [Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming](https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2019-11/19-200%20Minimun%20Standards%20Report%20ENGLISH-Nov%201.FINAL_.pdf), the ICGBV requires that this research be carried out In line with GBV guiding principles, including confidentiality. Any information about survivors will only be shared with their informed consent.

## Scope

We wish to determine the evidence or emerging evidence of initiatives that deeply embedded GBV survivors as they sought accountability under each of the three dimensions, Prevention, Mitigation and Response across humanitarian, development and peace support work. This is not limited to the countries in which ICGBV members operate but should be determined by finding the best/emerging practice. Include a mix of initiatives from micro, meso and maco levels – from grassroots to district, to state and regional initiatives.

Survivor-led initiatives on accountability should demonstrate as many of the following as possible:

* Have been proven successful (as determined by survivors)
* Ensure a holistic understanding of the impact of the violence and effects, on the survivor – medical, legal, psychosocial, economic, social, caring responsibilities, accommodation, family and community relationships
* Take into account the agency and resources of the survivor
* How the intersectionality of survivors (how their ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status, marital status, age, race, refugee/IDP/migrant status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression etc.) has been recognised and responded to
* Are cost efficient in low-resource settings
* Could be replicated or scaled up
* Take a gender-transformative approach

Information on initiatives that were tried but were not found successful, will also be useful to discuss in the desk review for learning purposes.

The researcher can define what is in scope under of the three dimensions, Prevention, Mitigation and Response. Please see pages 5-6 for definitions. The following are suggestions:

**GBV Prevention** - work in the policy, legal and financing spaces, in addition to cultural and social norm change work. The scope could include:

* legal and policy development or reform or development
* budget monitoring and/or accountability
* behavioural change programmes
* training of magistrates or customary law courts
* police reform
* input into Status of Forces Agreement (e.g. UN peacekeeping missions) or DPO (UN Department of Peace Operation) country reporting processes
* working with political parties on manifestos

**GBV Risk Mitigation** – survivors’ involvement in risk identification in the design phase of humanitarian response and development work and in designing the actions to reduce those risks. The scope could include:

* women-only humanitarian response programmes with a GBV focus
* design of safety audits for camp management in refugee or IDP settings
* inclusion of financing for GBV risk mitigation in humanitarian and development budgets
* gender-based violence mapping in countries
* referral service identification
* design and implementation of complaints response mechanisms
* design of systems and structures that seek to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and/or safeguard vulnerable adults and children
* involvement of survivors in the monitoring and evaluation of interventions
* survivor involvement in the design and review of naval rescue efforts of refugees and migrants

**GBV Response** - survivor-led, holistic and comprehensive, community-based, in addition to being trauma-informed, multisectoral, engaging both formal and informal mechanism and actors and includes laws, policies (and practices) that hold perpetrators accountable (CARE). The scope could include:

* advising service providers (key stakeholders). Survivors’ experience of their journey in accessing the myriad of necessary supports they have had to engage with in order to get results, should be included. It is only by engaging with survivors directly, do you uncover the whole extent of their journey.[[5]](#footnote-6)
* design of referral mechanisms
* development and oversight of State action plans on Women, Peace and Security
* establishment of Gender Commissions into Peace Agreements/Peace Processes

## Deliverables

* Carry out relevant desk-based research, with an emphasis on grey literature, on Gender-based violence survivor-led accountability
* Produce a clear and compelling report with strong recommendations based on evidence of established and emerging good practice in GBV survivor-led initiatives across the prevention, mitigation and response trajectory, to inform policy and practice (15-20 pages) on GBV
  + Two examples are sought under each of the pillars: Prevention, Mitigation and Response
  + Elaboration on 3-6 best examples overall
  + Produce recommendations under each of the three pillars and overall recommendations
* Maintain strong communications and collaboration with the ICGBV Secretariat throughout the process of developing, finalising and launching the paper.

**Key Terms:**

**Gender-based violence:** Any act of violence that arises from or is driven by inequalities, discrimination, roles, disparities or expectations based on gender. It includes any act that results in, or is likely to cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering for an individual or group of people, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.[[6]](#footnote-7) *(ICGBV Strategic Plan 2021-6)*

**What GBV includes:**

GBV is a fundamental violation of human rights. GBV includes sexual violence (including sex trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment); physical violence; emotional and psychological violence; socio-economic violence; harmful traditional practices (including female genital mutilation/cutting, forced or early marriage, honour killings) and intimate partner violence. GBV should be addressed at all levels from individual to institutional.[[7]](#footnote-8)

**Who is affected by GBV:**

All sections of society can be affected by GBV but certain groups can be more vulnerable; particularly women and girls. LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people) populations and other sexual and gender minorities also experience and can be the targets of GBV precisely because they do not conform to and/or challenge prevailing gender norms and expectations. GBV against men and boys is often hidden and can be particularly prevalent in conflict settings. We believe that every person, regardless of their gender or sexuality, has the right to live free from violence.[[8]](#footnote-9)

**Prevention:**

GBV prevention principally involves addressing and advancing gender equality. This requires addressing both the power imbalances between women/girls and men/boys, as well as the social and gender norms that justify gender inequality. Gender norms are reflected in the attitudes and values of individuals, and within the family, community and society at large – this is referred to as the socio-ecological model. The ICGBV identifies the work of addressing power imbalances and gender norms as gender-transformative work.[[9]](#footnote-10)

**Mitigation:**

GBV risk mitigation comprises a range of activities in the context of humanitarian response and development work that aim to first identify GBV risks and then take specific actions to reduce those risks. GBV risk can exist in the general environment, within families and communities and in the provision of humanitarian service provision and development programming.[[10]](#footnote-11)

**Response:**

GBV response is the provision of survivor-centred services aimed at promoting and preserving confidentiality, safety, non-discrimination and respect for the choices, rights and dignity of GBV survivors.[[11]](#footnote-12) This includes a broad range of services and programming like access to security and justice, psychosocial support, safety and risk mitigation, and health care whether in the context of a humanitarian crisis or development work.

**Victim/survivor**:

The term ‘victim/survivor’ is used to enable recognition that women and girls are victims of sexual attack, as well as survivors in the longer term and may transition between both identities.[[12]](#footnote-13)

**Accountability:**

The term ‘Accountability’ and ‘survivor-led accountability’ would benefit from closer examination. The quality or state of being accountable is defined by Merriam-Webster, as an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions[[13]](#footnote-14): The OECD defines accountability in general, as accounting for services delivered by policymakers and providers to clients, and a stronger voice of poor men and women towards policymakers and providers in return for the delegation of tasks, power or resources to policymakers and providers. (Lawsen & Rackner).[[14]](#footnote-15) In relation to GBV, the OECD recommends that the interconnectedness among criminal, civil, and other legal proceedings regarding GBV are recognised, and steps are taken to co-ordinate judicial responses, with support provided to accompany a survivor throughout the process (OECD)[[15]](#footnote-16). Global Rights for Women believe that accountability of the perpetrator and of states should be included.[[16]](#footnote-17) Women’s Aid UK recommends that a national oversight mechanism is developed to provide oversight and accountability to the funding of women’s refuge services.[[17]](#footnote-18)

## Annex: Key Findings from literature review on ‘survivor-centred accountability’

* If the existing resources of a survivor are not taken into account this could indirectly or directly lead to a re-victimisation of the survivor. These resources often lie in the survivors' social networks with families, communities, NGOs and government agencies.
* In times of conflict, there are sometimes people that are not only survivor or only perpetrator. Some people will be both. Therefore, a survivor of gender-based violence at the same time can also have perpetrated gender-based violence. However, they remain survivors that have priorities, wants and needs that should be included. This said, they should not be treated as sole survivors and their role as perpetrator should be taken into consideration in accountability mechanisms.
* For a truly survivor-centred approach, the children that resulted from gender-based violence and in turn experience structural and cultural harms need to be considered and included.
* A holistic understanding of gender-based violence includes looking at how gender-based violence affects women, girls, men, boys, members of the LGBTQI+ community and people with disabilities differently and responding to these different priorities, wants and needs in accountability mechanisms.
* It is important to take intersectionality into account. Intersectionality means understanding that survivors are multi-dimensional people; they are not a homogenous group and will have different experiences, needs and wants depending on their sexual orientation and gender identity, socio-economic status, ability, refugee/IDP/migrant status, race, ethnicity, age etc.
* Definitions of transitional justice mechanisms, especially criminal proceedings, are mostly defined as sexual violence, which does not encompass the entirety of gender-based violence. Thus, transitional justice mechanisms should include a wider variety of harms.
* The effects of socioeconomic gender based harms can have a more immediate effect on survivors and for that reason are prioritised. Including socioeconomic harm into the understanding of gender-based violence can be one avenue in reaching accountability for gender-based violence.
* There is a need to look at gender-based violence as a whole and its connectivity to other forms of violence, even those that are not connected to gender. The aftermath of violence will always be intrinsically connected and not so easily separated into violence A and violence B.
* Often, countries’ militaries have independent justice systems that operate differently from civilian systems. With respect to GBV, this creates additional and unique challenges for ensuring access to justice for survivors/victims and for holding perpetrators accountable. However, to date, limited comparative country analysis appears to have been conducted on military justice systems’ handing of GBV. (OECD)

1. The Irish Consortium on Gender-based violence (ICGBV) was established in 2005 in response to the systematic sexual violence and abuse occurring in Darfur, Sudan. Bringing together fourteen diverse organisations including humanitarian and development NGOs, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Irish Defence Forces, the Consortium focuses on addressing GBV in the context of international humanitarian and development work, across forty countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. “the analysis reveals that humanitarian system power dynamics distort the application of SCA, leaving humanitarian service providers in charge of assessing the best course of action or severely limiting survivors’ choices. We propose a survivor led approach as more aligned with the feminist and transformative goals of humanitarian action against GBV.” *From:* [“Who Is Centered in the Humanitarian Response to Gender-Based Violence? A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Survivor-Centered Approach”](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10778012241231783) (2024) Ilaria Michelis, Jane Makepeace, and Chen Reis (2024)  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Prevention and mitigation of, and response to, GBV are classified as life-saving interventions in humanitarian settings by CERF (United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund), 2010. CERF Life-saving Criteria), as referenced in the [UNFPA Minimum Standards](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/19-200_Minimun_Standards_Report_ENGLISH-Nov.FINAL_.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. materials and research produced by organisations outside of tradition commercial or academic publishing channels [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Sisi (Survivors informing services and institutions) presentation during [ICGBV 16 Days webinar, Strengthening Survivor Centred Accountability for Gender-based violence 7 Dec 2024](https://www.gbv.ie/strengthening-survivor-centred-accountability-for-gender-based-violence-2/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf](https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. [Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf](https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. [Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf](https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. [Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf](https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Background document for UNICEF/CARE/Oxfam Operational Partnerships on GBV Risk Mitigation. Available [here](http://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/What-is-GBV-Risk-Mitigation.pdf). (see also [Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf](https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf)) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards. Available [here](https://www.unfpa.org/minimum-standards). (see also [Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf](https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Strategic-Plan-ICGBV.pdf)) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. *It was a term expressly wished for by those consulted for*

    *research by Aisling Swaine, Addressing the Gendered Interests of Victims/Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Their Children Through National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs 7(2) 145–176, 2020 and by victims/survivors interviewed by Róisín Gallagher in research conducted in Sierra Leone in relation to accessing justice.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. [Accountability Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accountability). Accessed 15/04/24 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. [https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/45745924.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/45745924.pdf#:~:text=Accountability%20is%20defined%20as%3A%20accounting%20for%20services%20delivered,tasks%2C%20power%20or%20resources%20to%20policymakers%20and%20providers.) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Strengthening governance and survivor/victim-centres approaches to eliminating gender-based violence, OECD GOV/PGC/GMG(2020)2/REV3. 30 April 2021, page 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Time for action The Way to a Binding International Treaty on Violence Against Women, Global Rights for Women, March 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. [Refuge-Funding-Model-Report-FINAL-WEB.pdf (womensaid.org.uk)](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Refuge-Funding-Model-Report-FINAL-WEB.pdf?_gl=1*1kkf17w*_up*MQ..*_ga*MTE5NDY3MzQwOS4xNzEzMTcyNzkx*_ga_C8H9JGBD77*MTcxMzE3Mjc4OC4xLjEuMTcxMzE3Mjk0NC4wLjAuMA..), accessed 15/4/24 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)